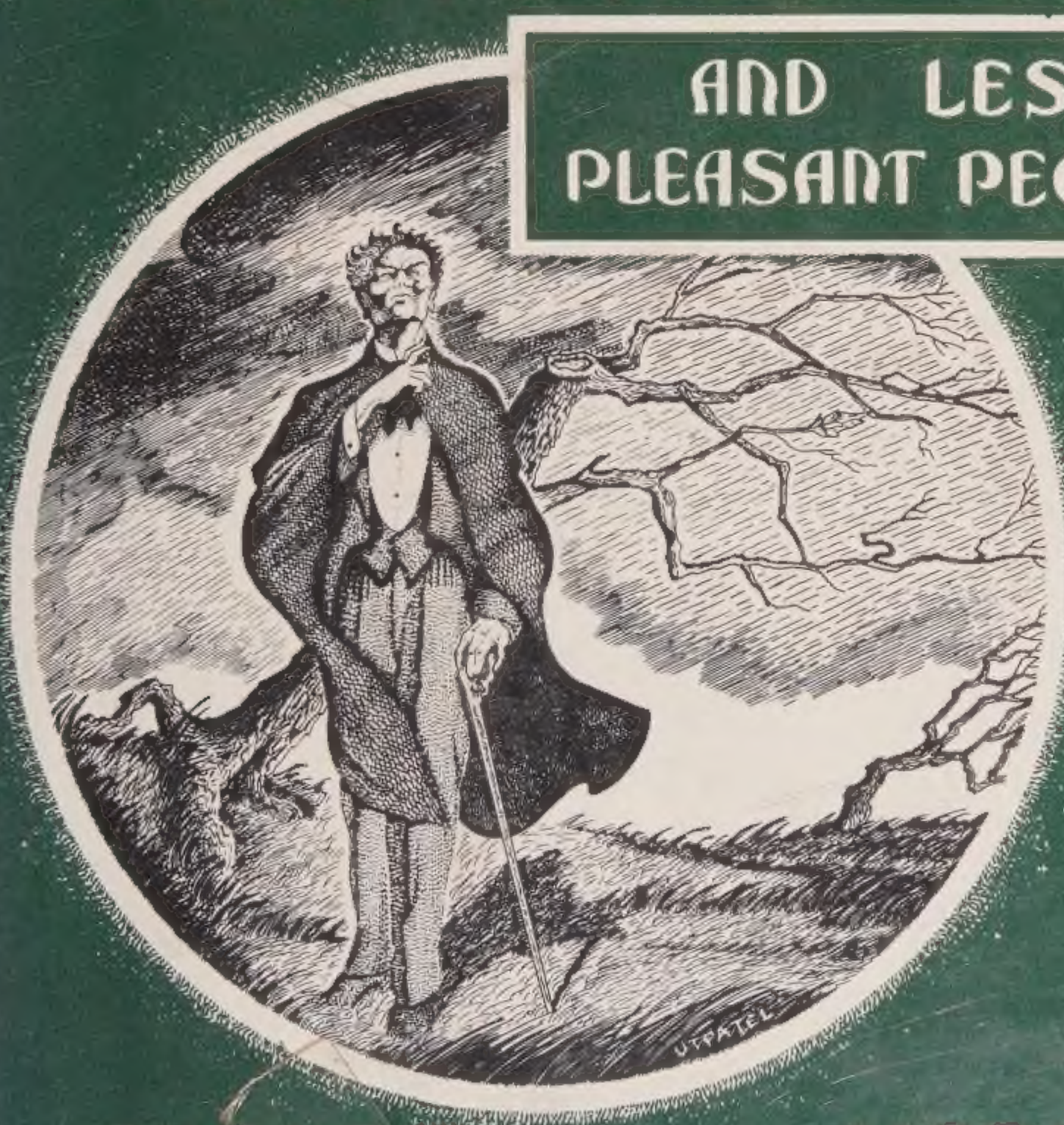


# COLONEL MARKESAN

AND LESS  
PLEASANT PEOPLE



AUGUST & MARK  
DERLETH SCHORER



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# COLONEL MARKESAN AND LESS PLEASANT PEOPLE

by

AUGUST DERLETH

and

MARK SCHORER

The tales in this collection run the gamut of familiar gambits in the domain of the macabre, from werewolves (*The Woman at Loon Point*) to zombies (*The House in the Magnolias*), from the ancient curse (*The Vengeance of Ai*) to the haunted house (*The Pacer*). The then youthful authors intentionally wrote this series of stories so as to involve as many weird themes as possible and assemble a group of varied entertainments in the field of eerie fiction. Not even the Cthulhu Mythos has been overlooked (*The Lair of the Star-Spawn*).

Giving themselves the time of one summer, working alternately—Schorer by day, Derleth by night—the authors, then in their early twenties, and both at the beginning of distinguished literary careers, set for themselves a writing program that might have daunted far more experienced craftsmen, working day after day on plots woven around traditional themes in settings that ranged the globe. All but one of the stories in this collection came out of that one summer, and none of them has undergone revision.

\* \* \*

One of the tales in this collection, *In the Left Wing*, introduced the work of Frank Utpatel to readers of *Weird Tales*, for it was this Wisconsin artist who drew the heading for that story—and it is Frank Utpatel, too, who has prepared the jacket for this book.

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COLONEL MARKESAN AND LESS PLEASANT PEOPLE





*Colonel Markesan  
And  
Less Pleasant People*

*by*

AUGUST DERLETH

&

MARK SCHORER



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ARKHAM HOUSE: Publishers

Sauk City, Wisconsin

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## FOREWORD

The stories in this collection grew out of a felicitous collaborative effort in the summer of 1931—though we had passed through an initial stage of collaboration during our high school years (at least one of these stories, *The Pacer*, pre dates 1931), and we were accustomed to each other and tolerant of each other's vagaries. One of us was home for the summer from a year of teaching at a military academy in Missouri and preparing for post-graduate work at Wisconsin and Harvard, the other was back to stay in Sauk City, Wisconsin, having resigned an editorial position with Fawcett Publications in order to do or die as a writer. Though both our homes were in Sauk City, we chose not to work in them but to rent what had once been a summer cottage on the village's main street, just north of the business section, in a relatively quiet zone on the west bank of the Wisconsin. Into this cottage we moved typewriters and all the paraphernalia incidental to writing, and got to work at it—principally by day—retiring to our respective quarters at night.

The site of our efforts to earn money by writing pulp fiction was far removed in actuality from the terror-fraught subjects about which we wrote, one more idyllic could hardly have been found in the confines of Sauk City, for, while it fronted on a thoroughfare constantly in movement, it opened at the rear upon tranquility itself—the Wisconsin flowing past, the hills of the moraine across the river to the east with grazing cattle to complete the pastoral scene. It ought not to be thought that all our efforts were devoted to the writing of weird fiction; each of us was also giving time to more meaningful work which we were submitting to such little magazines as *The Midland*, *This Quarter*, *Hound & Horn*, *Pagan*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Trend*, *Trails*, *Contempo*, and others.

The interior of the cottage was rather spare; it consisted primarily of one large room—the only room we used, which was furnished with two small tables, for our typewriters, two chairs, and a lounge for

that one of us who tired first. The lounge, it must be admitted, was little used, though the windows to the east and a little porch along the east wall were very much in use for the day-dreaming so vital to the mood and conditions of creative work.

It was seldom necessary, as events turned out, to work side by side, for all that the project was a full-fledged collaboration. One of us found it wise to supplement his income by working part of the summer in the local canning factory, and write therefore in the evening hours of each day, when, for a brief time we were together long enough to plan the next day's work. This was a long enough time to decide on theme and setting, for the method of work was this—the basic outline for each story was set down by Derleth, the entire first draft then written by Schorer, a final revision made by Derleth. Thus, when Mark Schorer came to write each morning (while Derleth was off to the factory), he found an outline for the day's story beside his typewriter, and got to work writing that story—sometimes, in the case of a relatively short tale, in one day, sometimes in two or even three; when Derleth in turn showed up in these creative precincts each evening, he went over the manuscript, sometimes rewriting, sometimes simply retyping selected pages or paragraphs; and prepared the story for submission—usually to *Weird Tales* or *Strange Tales*, and rounded out the evening by outlining the next story to be done.

In our meetings we seldom found it necessary to talk very much about methods or plots. Our collaborative conversation usually concerned theme and setting. "Let's see—we did the werewolf theme yesterday—how about a zombie story tomorrow?" Or, "Well, how would you like to spend tomorrow in New Orleans after today in the Sahara?" And in this lighthearted manner we planned and wrote these stories which will not add in the slightest to the body of American literature, but may afford a few hours' entertainment to lovers of cold grue and stark terror.

One of these stories—*The Return of Andrew Bentley*—it might be pointed out, achieved a sort of modest fame by its inclusion in Bennett Cerf's Modern Library anthology, *Famous Ghost Stories*, and more recently entertained an even wider audience on television—but the

remainder saw the light of day only briefly and then sank back into merciful oblivion. These tales have been given this second lease on print rather to indicate the literary beginnings of two friends who went on to make something more of a mark in letters well removed from the genre of the macabre, than to serve as examples of the best in the domain of the weird—they are, we fear, considerably below that level, however much passing entertainment they may offer to those delvers in *curiosa* and *exotica* who are devoted to the Gothic tradition

—August Derleth  
Mark Schorer





COLONEL MARKESAN AND LESS PLEASANT PEOPLE





## *In the Left Wing*

If I had not counted John Thraves my best friend, I should in all likelihood never have gone up the Massachusetts coast on that unpleasant and foreboding journey climaxed by that unforgettable visit to the lonely house beyond Gloucester. A strange silence, broken now and then by vague, incoherent letters, had been the determining factor in my visit, and as I sit here now, writing this, I cannot help but feel how much more at ease I would be, had I chosen to disregard this silence; how much better, indeed, if I had forgotten my friend altogether. But now, alas! it is impossible for me ever to forget John Thraves.

Our acquaintance had begun at college, a common interest in architecture serving to draw us closer and closer together as the years of our college training went by. The acquaintance ripened into a friendship that continued for some time after we were graduated. Indeed, it was interrupted only by Thraves' deep love for Dorothea Keane, a love so profound, so absorbing, that it enslaved Thraves, a man whose iron will at college had been a continual source of admiration to me. And I could fully understand his love for this strangely fascinating woman, she who might have been such a woman as Rossetti would have painted — tall and slender, her features of that fine classic mold so idealized at the end of the last century, with the pallid olive quality in complexion and same smoldering auburn hair that belonged to the harmony that was hers. I have an unforgettable picture of her, alone in a box at the opera, wrapped in a green velvet cloak, her oddly disquieting face and auburn hair standing out serenely in the glittering of the diamond horseshoe.

It was this woman who drew to her John Thraves, body and soul. In August of the same year he met her, they were engaged, and in September I saw the last of Thraves and Dorothea Keane, when my firm sent me to Vienna to study. I was still in Europe when terrible tragedy struck at my friend, sending him from New York City to virtual isolation at the old Thraves estate on the Massachusetts coast. They were to have been married at Christmas. A week before, Dorothea contracted a severe cold, which speedily developed into pneumonia, resulting in her death two days before the date set for the wedding.

Her death shattered John Thraves' life, and his vainly hopeful letters did not deceive me. The tragedy was consummated in a ghastly fashion when the Keane family vault was opened one night and the body of the lovely Dorothea removed in its casket. Though this terrible thing happened only two days after her burial, it was over a month later before I had learned of it, and only then did I know the reason for the inexplicable silence on the part of my friend. How great this added shock must have been to him was indicated to me by the fact that not once in subsequent letters did he so much as hint of it.

From the time that John Thraves had retired to the lonely estate on the hook beyond Gloucester, the letters I had from him were filled with a deep melancholy, and were often extremely brief, tense, paradoxical notes. All during the following spring and summer, his letters, strange long epistles, became more and more incoherent and rambling. More often than not, he would start his letters with terse sentences about the unruly weather that swept the Massachusetts coast; then, suddenly, in the middle of a paragraph, he would write incomprehensible nonsense about life after death, or some kindred subject. One paragraph, which he started, as customary, with a sentence about the weather, contained no less than thirty different subjects, ranging all the way from black magic to certain mystic rites performed in the African Impi country.

His reference to black magic, more constant than any other reference, puzzled and disturbed me most. The impressions his letters gave varied fully as much as his subject matter. At one time I had the impression that he was himself practising black magic, at another time that he was writing a book on the subject; and at still another time he wrote in

such shuddering terms of black magic that I thought for an instant that his mind had been unsettled.

In September of the following year I returned to New York, fully expecting that before many weeks were up, I should get an invitation to join my old friend on the Thraves estate. But none came. The same incoherent letters continued to reach me, breaking into long periods of silence, until at last I decided that I would seek him out, whether he so desired or not. My first impulse to announce my arrival I discarded at the last moment, a vague belief that he might try to prevent or discourage my coming occurring to trouble me.

I left New York one morning in November, and came into Boston at about six that night. It was raining, and the mists were crowding into the city from the sea. I was glad to leave mist-haunted Boston behind me, even though the two-hour ride to Gloucester promised me little change in scene. On the way, the downpour increased, the heavy rain so drenching the panes of my coach that I could not see an inch out into the autumn evening. I reflected upon how inauspicious a moment I had chosen to visit my old friend, but in the same thought saw that I should certainly not be turned away into a night like this, should my visit prove as unwelcome as my ever increasing forebodings suggested to me.

The station at Gloucester was deserted when my train drew in. I stepped down to the platform and looked about me. The night was dark now, and not far away the sea was dashing itself against the rocks of the coast. The rain still came down heavily, and I pulled my raincoat closer around me. A single light on the platform showed only a dim haze through the rain. Some one finally came along the platform toward me, and I recognized him for a cab-driver whom Thraves and I had used in our college days. His appearance served only to bring back memories which time had thrust far into the past.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

He did not recognize me. I put down my bag. "To the Thraves place," I said.

"You don't want to be goin' over there tonight, sir?"

"Yes. Of course. Why not?"

"Well," he drawled, "it's a bit far on an unholy night like this."

"Nonsense," I snapped. "It's just around the end of the hook, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Not more than two miles, is it?"

"No, sir, but——"

"Well, then?" I said sharply.

" 'Tis a bad night, sir," he started again, but I cut him short.

"Take me there," I said.

He grumbled something, but picked up my bag. We started for his car, which became visible now at the end of the platform. I stepped into the back and pulled the door shut behind me. The driver tossed my bags into the front, and climbed in after them. He started up the engine, but before he left the platform, he turned around to me and called as if in afterthought, "I can't be takin' you further than the gate, sir. The road don't go no further."

"Very well."

I remembered the Thraves estate, and the rides there from Gloucester. When we were yet at college, John Thraves and I had come up occasionally for a weekend. Gloucester on a sunny day is a charming city, with the blue sky above and the blue sea below, disturbed only by the slightest roll on its surface, rippling the reflections of the clouds. In the harbor in the morning can be seen the thousand masts of the fishing fleet moving out through the dawn mists, and at sunset, moving back in, crowding the bay. And in the air always is the strong salty odor of the sea.

But tonight it was not like that. There was nothing to be seen through the rain and blackness, save only an occasional glimmer moving in the distance, the light of a vessel in the harbor, perhaps. We were out of Gloucester before I had seen more than the dim, half-disclosed outlines of a dozen scattered buildings. By the way the wind blew the rain against the car, I knew that we were moving along the hook, with the ocean on two sides of us. There was nothing out there but black space and an occasional faint light, and, once or twice, the raucous voice of a foghorn far out on the bay.



We came to a stop abruptly, and the driver turned around with, "Here you be, sir. Seventy-five cents, please, sir."

I paid him, and found myself deposited with my bag on the sandy road before the gate that marked the edge of the Thraves estate. It was a good ten minutes' walk from the gate to the house, I knew, and a not too pleasant walk through what was a wood of pines almost as black as the night itself. I started out, unhesitatingly, through the grilled gate and up the stone path under the trees. The rain still came down, and the wind swept in from the sea, bending and swaying the creaking trees. The steady pounding of the surf, sounding rhythmically against the rocky point of the hook, came to my ears as from a great distance. I looked ahead of me and thought I saw a light where the dark mass of the house loomed; but it was faint and dim, and it seemed to waver, so that I could not be sure if it were a real light or an illusion. But as I came closer, I saw that it was indeed a light, a light from the lower windows of the left wing, but even close I saw it dim and faint, as if it were the light of candles burning in the room behind drawn curtains, not a definite light at all, but more a blur where the windows were, drawn curtains veiling the house from the bleak night.

I was now at the very edge of the pine grove that surrounded the house, and I stood in the shelter of the great, gaunt trunk of the one tree that reared itself near the door, looking at this rambling old New England country home, with its low roofs and many gables, feeling an incomprehensible sense of fear, of danger almost, a sensation which seemed to suggest abrupt, unexplained flight to me. The wind and the rain, the sighing and creaking of the pines, the distant melancholy pounding of the sea, the old wooden house with its single gray light—these details gave me a feeling of stark and impenetrable gloom, a feeling so strong for a moment I hesitated to pierce the solitude of my old friend Thraves. But my hesitation lasted only a moment, and it was gone, it was not as easy to shake off the somber gloominess which enshrouded me.

Unhesitating, I approached the door, put my hand on the great iron knocker, lifted it, and let it drop. There came to my ears the sharp sound made by iron striking iron, and immediately after, muffled rever-

berations within the house sounded extraordinarily loud in a sudden lull in the wind. Then the sound died, and there was again only the rain, the wind, and the constant sea.

Once more I lifted the knocker and let it fall, and again I heard the sound of iron and the magnified sounds from within the house. Still there was no sign that my knock had been heard.

I turned and looked back into the pine grove, at the dim line I knew to be the path by which I had come. Should I start the long walk back to Gloucester and await the coming day to find my friend? But that was a good half-hour's walk in the rain, and already I was chilled to the bone, wet and shivering. The pine trees sobbed in the wind, and in a sudden gust, the rain came beating down into my upturned face.

I turned to the shadowed door once more, determined to try the knocker yet again. I had just lifted my hand, when the door was pulled silently back, and a man stood there, holding aloft a guttering candle.

"Who is it?" asked a gruff voice, which I recognized at once as that of Fenton, the caretaker. At least, I thought, Thraves is not alone in this dismal house.

"It's Mr. Suthard, Park Suthard," I replied. "Do you remember me, Fenton?"

A sound like a startled gasp came from Fenton. He raised the candle above his head, and stepped aside. "Come in, come in, Mr. Suthard," he said, almost eagerly.

I put down my bag in the hall and turned to him. "Is your master here?" I asked.

He nodded his white head slowly. "Yes, he's here." Then he held the candle close to my face and peered at me over his spectacles; a smile broke into his wrinkled face, a face which my instinct told me had not smiled for many months. "Well, well, Mr. Suthard it is," he said, still smiling crookedly. "I'm glad."

He led the way slowly down the hall, mumbling more to himself than to me: ". . . glad you've come. When you came up with the young master you were always one to be laughing and joking and carrying on as young folk should. Perhaps now, Mr. Thraves . . . perhaps you can make him laugh again."

I said, "Nothing wrong, is there, Fenton?"

He stopped and looked at me speculatively. Then he shook his head "Would I say wrong, I wonder?" he murmured "He's not been the same, sir," he went on, 'a bit queer, sir. It was after that young lady———"

I nodded, cutting him off with a word. "Could I see him tonight?" I asked.

Fenton hesitated. "He's in the left wing, sir, and I'm not allowed in there. I'll try to call him, though he does not like to be disturbed. But then, he does spend most of his time in there, and I can do no more than try, sir."

Fenton shook his head, mumbling to himself. He led the way through open doors into what had been the drawing-room. The candle light betrayed the strange state of neglect into which the once grand old room had fallen. As I crossed the threshold, the broken end of a gossamer thread caught my face. The absence of electricity struck me suddenly; I had expected Fenton to switch on the lights as we entered the room, but he had not done so.

"Don't you have any lights?" I asked.

Fenton shook his head. "No, sir. They were blown out in a storm about a month ago, and Mr. Thraves won't have them repaired."

'Won't have them repaired?' I exclaimed.

"I keep telling him," Fenton said. Then he shrugged his shoulders. 'But he won't have anything done. Won't have any one here, prying about, he says. It's not any longer for me to say, sir'"

Fenton busied himself now with by bag, took my hat and coat, and then lit some wood that lay in the open fireplace. In a few moments the slowling creeping flames had grown into a blaze. But the added light from the flames made the old drawing room only more gloomy, for it showed still more clearly the heavy dust that lay thickly on all the furniture, the walls, the rugs, and the unbroken spider webs that were spun across the windows and in the darkened corners of the room.

Fenton pulled a chair up to the fireplace, brushed it off with his handkerchief, and offered it to me. I sat down, rubbing my hands together, trying to stop my chattering teeth.

"I'll try to get Mr. Thraves for you now, sir," he said.

I nodded. He walked out into the hall, and then I heard a door close behind him. Shortly after, I heard his voice calling John Thraves, it was as he had said—he was not allowed in the left wing, and was forced to call his master from the old-fashioned double doors leading into the wing.

I leaned toward the already dying flames. For almost a half-hour I sat there, the silence of the house growing on me more steadily each moment. Fenton's voice had long ceased calling, but he had not returned, and I did not know whether he had been able to gain John Thraves' attention until I heard a door open suddenly, and the sound of slippered feet coming slowly along the hall. I turned expectantly toward the door of the room.

It is impossible to describe adequately the appearance of my friend as he stood in that doorway, his face lit by the last dancing light of the dying fire, impossible to convey fully the shock I felt at sight of him. I had left him not much over a year ago as I had always known him, erect, dark-haired, his face healthily tanned, his eyes bright, his lips firm. The figure I now beheld was everything that the John Thraves I had known was not. He was clad in a long black robe that swept the floor; it was open at the throat and its scarlet lining served only to heighten the grayness of his face, his pallid, ghostly cheeks, his gleaming, feverish eyes, his colorless lips, drooping loosely and revoltingly. His hair was long and unkempt, and there was a stubble on his chin sufficiently thick to be called a beard, a mustache, too, had grown. His thin shoulders and his back were bent forward, giving him the posture of an old man, burdened with years. I felt his burning eyes sweep me from head to foot. The smile with which I had awaited him died on my lips; I could not speak. He came toward me, slowly, walking like an old man, shuffling along, dragging his slippered feet after him.

Then he spoke. His low-pitched voice was the tense voice of a man ill of some incurable disease. "You have come," he said.

I smiled, trying to shake off the strange premonitory feeling that had come over me. "How are you, John?" I asked, rising. He was looking



at me vaguely, unseeingly, dispassionately. "I finally decided I had to come to know how you were."

He smiled a little, then raised a thin hand and brushed back the long hair from his forehead. "I am glad," he said simply, "only I don't know where to put you. We've got nothing in order here. My studies ———" His voice trailed off into nothingness, and he looked abstractedly around him, his hand straying to his neck, where the open robe revealed his dead-white skin. Then he turned abruptly, calling, "Fenton! Fenton!"

Fenton appeared out of the hall. It was as if he had been waiting. "Yes, sir," he said. "You called, sir."

"Is there a room in order for Mr. Suthard?"

Fenton hesitated. Then he said, "Any of the upper rooms in the left wing can be made ready in a few minutes, sir."

Thraves passed his thin hands through his hair; his eyes were undecided. "Only in the left wing?" he asked irritably.

Fenton nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Very well. Take the bag up, build a fire, and lay out the linen. But mind you go up the front way. And leave us a light here."

"Yes, sir," murmured Fenton. He lit a taper and stood it on the mantel. Then he bent to take my bag and shot a guarded look at me; his expression said, "You see how he has changed?" Then he went out of the room, and I heard him going slowly up the stairs at the end of the hall.

Thraves turned to me. "A year now," he said abruptly.

I nodded. "Over," I said. Looking at him, I began to wish I hadn't come.

He peered at me intently for a moment; then his eyes shifted and he looked at the last glowing embers in the fireplace. "I have been ill," he said, making a vague gesture with his hands. Then he sat down, and we spoke briefly of my European year. At odd moments, there were gleams of our old intimacy, yet never was our conversation free from the feeling of a wall between us. Often, Thraves' face betrayed a preoccupation which was not natural to him. Then, suddenly, he interrupted himself in the middle of a sentence, just as he had done so

often in his letters, and said, "Did I write to you of black magic? Did I write you of my work?"

I said, "You did say something about black magic, but I have forgotten what it was."

He nodded quickly. "An interesting study, black magic" He would have gone on, but something interrupted him. He sat bolt upright, all his faculties straining to listen, a sharp exclamation checked on his lips. "Is there something?" he asked. "Do you hear anything? Did you hear——"

I had heard a shuffling noise during a lull in the storm, but had assumed it to be Fenton. "No," I said, "I heard nothing."

He was reassured at once. Then he went on where he had broken off. "Long ago I was interested in black magic. There were old books. I came upon an interesting theory about life after death, and it is believed by some to be still in practical use."

I thought: He is rambling. I said, "I remember. You wrote me of it."

He looked slightly puzzled. "Did I? I can't remember." He looked at me a little askance. "But you don't believe in black magic, do you, Suthard?"

I shook my head. "No, I don't."

He clasped his hands and looked at me. "You know," he went on, "there is a theory about the animation of dead bodies—embalmed bodies, that is. But Lord God, there is no soul!" His eyes, as he said this, were so tragic that I felt for a moment that John Thraves had gone utterly mad.

I got to my feet, feigning a yawn. "I'd like to get to bed, if you don't mind, old man," I said.

The words had hardly left my lips when Fenton entered the room, again I had the uncomfortable impression that he had been waiting in the hall.

Thraves led the way up the stairs to my room. We went into the chamber, he still leading with the candle, which he placed on the bureau. Others were burning in brackets on the walls, so that the room was quite light.

I threw open the casement window, despite the wind and rain, for

there was a musty odor of age in the room that stifled and revolted me. Thraves did not seem to mind, for he went over and leaned out. Then he sank listlessly into a chair, with his back to the window.

"If you hear anything in the night, Suthard, don't be alarmed," he said. "And don't prow! about, please, because that disturbs me very much. Sometimes I walk in my sleep; if I should see anyone then, the shock might be too much for me. My heart is very bad."

Sympathetic words sprang quickly to my lips, but he halted them with a curt gesture. "I'm sorry," I murmured.

Thraves got up and went slowly to the door. "I didn't want to tell you," he said, "but I dare not take a risk." At the door, he turned to me. "You don't believe in black magic, do you, Suthard?" he asked, as if he had forgotten asking me before.

I shook my head.

"I didn't ask you before, did I?" he said suddenly, and before I could answer, continued, "No, no, of course not." He closed the door behind him.

My astonishment knew no bounds. Certainly something had occurred in the interval since Dorothea Keane's death to unsettle John Thraves' mind. When finally I had managed to subdue my agitation, I looked about the room. It was panelled with a dark wood, and the ceiling was low. The casement was in a gable, the floor of which was raised above the level of the floor of the room. I went to the window and looked out. The rain had abated somewhat, though the wind was still strong. There was the dark sea, and the white foam of the waves as they broke booming on the shore was visible from where I stood. Once more I felt the heavy atmosphere of this place bearing me down, and again the haggard appearance of John Thraves suddenly remembered depressed me further. There was something evil here, something brooding in the air about the house. And John, I felt, knew and recognized it for what it was.

I moved away from the window, and went to the door. I pulled the door open slowly, held my candle high, and peered into the long shadowy hall. It was an action with no motive, and I would have withdrawn into my room in an instant, had not a small white object on the

floor of the hall slightly down and across from my door attracted my attention. With pardonable curiosity, I stepped swiftly forward and picked it up, taking it with me into my room. What I held in my hand brought all my senses instantly alert, and at the same moment perplexed and astonished me. It was a woman's silk stocking, and it had been worn only once, and that recently!

I do not remember my chaotic thoughts clearly, but I do remember that one stood out above them all. Was the cause of Thraves' strangeness a woman, of whose existence I had not the slightest hint? Fenton would know, I thought, and I moved at once to summon him. But I paused with my hand on the bell rope; even while I thought that the clang of the bell might disturb Thraves, I saw that the rope had been cut a foot from the floor.

As I stood there, the stocking still held in my hand, the sound of slow-moving footsteps came to my ears. I listened carefully; they seemed to come from below, from the hall on the first floor of the left wing. But Fenton had told me that no one was allowed in the left wing—perhaps it was Thraves still moving about? Yes, as I remembered it now, Thraves' old room had been in the left wing, at the end of the hall. The footsteps came in all likelihood from him.

I retired to the great oak bed at last, and was just in the realm of semi-consciousness which precedes sleep, when a new sound smote upon my ears, disturbing the rhythmic pounding of the sea in the distance. It was the sound of even chanting, and what it suggested was so utterly remote from my surroundings, that I raised myself on my elbow to listen. It was indeed the sound of low chanting, coming faint, as if from a great distance. Yet I felt that it came from below, perhaps from the cellars below the old house. I had little time for speculation, however; for the rhythm of the chanting, the even beating of the waves outside, and the weariness which crept over me lulled me to sleep, to a sleep which was broken by vague, unnamable dreams of horror and dread, which brought me relief only at its end, when I woke in the dawn of a new day to find the gray rain still falling, the wind still blowing through the dark pines on the shore.



In the day, Thraves' tensivity of expression and preoccupation were noticeably lessened, and at odd moments he was even somewhat garrulous, though garrulity fitted him ill. In the morning, we walked out to the point that stretched like a finger into the sea, and from there looked across the bay to the ship-filled harbor. The rain still blew down in sheets, whipping across the face of the sea, but that morning it was invigorating to stand under its force, and I lifted my face to its cool rush in a vain attempt to clear my mind of the vague doubts and questions that clouded it. John wished to go back to the house, and indeed, I saw that he was in no physical condition to withstand a storm of such vehemence. Reluctantly I went back to the dark neglected house.

Later that morning, I mentioned to John the walking I had heard below me during the night, but he waved it aside. "No, no, Park! Surely not! I went directly to bed."

I said, "I'm sure I heard footsteps, and some one, I think, singing."

He started, but recovered almost at once. "You must have been dreaming," he replied. I remember that I got a book to read myself to sleep with, ' he added, "but there was certainly no other sound." He looked at me sharply, watching my expression. I said nothing, though I could hardly contain myself. I had wanted to ask about a woman's stocking I had found, but I was glad now that I had asked first about the sounds from below. But I meant to ask Fenton, if I could find him.

I did see him twice, but only once to speak to. And then I had time only for a brief question. "Tell me, Fenton, is there a woman in this house somewhere?"

His face remained impassive, but he said, ' I am never allowed in the left wing, sir."

He was gone again before I realized that he had not answered my question, that he had, indeed, deliberately hedged. I did not attempt to follow him, to pursue my inquiry further, because Thraves was making an attempt to keep me with him.

As the day wore on, it became steadily more apparent to me that I was not a welcome guest, that my presence was distinctly not desired. At dinner that night, Thraves, after some preliminary remarks about

the persistence of the wet weather, turned suddenly to me and said, "I've put a book in your room with some marked passages that I want you to read, Park."

I said, "I was about to ask you for something to read tonight."

He lapsed into silence, and shortly after, I excused myself, pleading weariness. He demurred a little, but finally assented to my going; he was obviously glad that I was going to bed.

As I left the dining-room, the first distant rumblings of an approaching thunderstorm echoed across the bay. I found the book on the counterpane of my bed. I took it up, and found that it was a very old book in Latin; a glance at a few lines told me instantly that it was a book on black magic. I leafed through it, hoping to find the passages Thraves had said he had marked.

The first of these passages was nothing more than a rambling discourse on the actuality of black magic, and numerous contemporary cases of sorcery were cited to bolster up the writer's thesis. The second concerned a Florentine case of body-snatching, and was vaguely suggestive of magical rites. The fact that this was marked convinced me of an idea I had long before accepted—the loss of Dorothea Keane's body rather than her actual death, had upset my old friend's mind.

I put the book aside for a moment to get up and close the window, through which great gusts of rain were blowing; for the storm had reached the hook, and thunderous crashes now sounded and resounded. The waves, too, were booming against the coast with ever growing vehemence, and the vivid flashes of lightning reflected on the walls of my room despite the light from many candles.

It was when I returned to my book after this brief pause that I came upon the third and longest of the passages marked. I found myself at once interested, and read as eagerly as my none too thorough knowledge of Latin allowed me to; at best it was laborious reading. "The body does not die when the soul departs," the passage read, "and it is given to such as we are to preserve ourselves if we desire by magical means. Others, too, can be preserved by us, but this is dangerous, for it is then our living energy that animates the dead. For animation can

be brought about, but the soul is gone for ever. Remember this, and be not too urgent in matters such as these. A body must not be a week old, and yet it should be———" Here came a group of words which my limited knowledge could not enable me to translate. I read on beyond: "There are in the aether other souls, evil souls, which may take possession of the animate bodies, and drain the life from those near. The task is fraught with utmost terror and danger . . . "

For some time, as I read, there grew upon me the feeling that some subtle change had come over the room. I looked up, and sensed it immediately. There was an odor of burning incense, an unmistakable odor, which seemed to drift toward me from under the door to the hall.

I rose silently and opened the door, the scent in the hall was considerably stronger. As I stood there in the partly opened doorway, there came intermittently to my ears, above the noise of the storm outside, the same chanting which I had heard the night before, and again the sound of shuffling footsteps in the hall below. And then—another sound—a weird gibbering noise, in a voice that was not John Thraves'! It rose in a long uncanny wail, and died again, a shrill petulant cry, like the scream of a marmoset. I stood frozen, for just as certainly as that cry did not come from John Thraves, it came from the throat of a woman!

I withdrew abruptly into my room. For a moment I stood in perplexity; then I put my candle down, and went again into the dark hall. I crept quietly toward the back stairs from the floor below, up which the heavy scent of the incense came. On the stairs, the sounds from below were louder, more clearly defined. I hesitated, remembering suddenly that Thraves had said to Fenton on the night of my arrival, "Mind you go up the front way," and recalling that I had been kept carefully away from the lower floor of the left wing.

Then I went forward again, creeping slowly along. The shadowy hall below came gradually into sight. From the door of Thraves' room there came a wavering, shifting light, like the light of many candles, and as I stood there, looking downward, I heard once more that weird gibbering scream, breaking into the sound of Thraves' voice, which was chanting clearly in Latin. I moved forward, toward the half-opened



door. Though the chanting was clear now, I could not always distinguish the words uttered by John Thraves' deep voice, tense with passion and meaning. At intervals I heard low murmurings, sudden petulant cries in what was unquestionably a woman's voice. Then abruptly there came a shrill cry, and a sound as of some heavy object falling. And again the chanting, coming as if in great sobs.

I bent stealthily forward to look into the room, and in that instant two things happened—the elements singled out that accursed house, striking it with a bolt of lightning, and a sheet of flame shot into the room into which I was looking—and one instant before this happened, I saw into that room!

How I got out of the house, I do not know. I have a vague recollection of staggering down the long passage in the left wing, calling wildly to John Thraves, and coming to myself at last outside, with the rain beating down upon me, Fenton at my side, the house before me a great holocaust of flame. John Thraves was nowhere to be seen, and Fenton was running to and fro, calling in a quavering voice to his master.

I have tried since then to look back upon the whole affair dispassionately, but I can not do it. I have tried to forget the terrible evidence so unwittingly chronicled in the newspapers a few days after, telling of the discovery of charred bones from two bodies in the ruins of the old Thraves house, two bodies, one of which was undeniably a woman's! I am happy because of one thing—those ghastly books, those ancient volumes on black magic, were destroyed in the holocaust!

It is, I think, the terrible memory of what I saw in that room that will not let me rest, the memory that haunts me day and night. It is doubly horrible, this memory, in the light of what had gone before that sight into John Thraves' accursed room. I remember always more sharply Thraves' wild letters, his vague and incoherent allusions to black magic, and death after life, and that damnable chapter on the animation of the dead in that old book he had put into my room. The fear-haunted face of John Thraves, his gaunt, wasted body, his sad eyes, his pathetic mouth, he in that long black scarlet lined robe—this memory of him obsesses me always, suggesting so strongly a terrible



line in the book now forever lost. 'There are in the aether other souls, evil souls, which may take possession of the animate bodies, and drain the life from those near.'

But that is the least. If it were only that, and not that other memory! For as I looked into that incense clouded room, I saw John Thraves prostrate on the floor, his lips mumbling the low chanting I had heard, prostrate before a living, breathing creature, a hellish form draped in green, limned against the black walls, its auburn hair flaming in the candlelight, an accursed living thing from the furthestmost reaches of most evil cosmos, a creature with the form and face of the lovely Dorothea Keane!

## *Spawn of the Maelstrom*

Nobody speaks of Jason Warwick any more, nor mentions his strange disappearance from the face of the earth. It was a twenty-day mystery for the press, though Scotland Yard stuck at it for almost as many months before filing the case unsolved. But there are two people who know what happened and cannot speak, and only two—Sir John Hardie and I: only the two of us who know why and how Warwick vanished. Sir John has said it ought to be put down, even if only for cynical disbelief after we are gone. But some record of the weird and terrible incarnate evil that existed on an invisible plane parallel to ours must be left in the facts attending Jason Warwick's disappearance.

The mystery had its roots in Warwick's trip to the Lofoten Islands. Just before he left, I met him at the British Museum. He seemed curiously exhilarated, and his dark, handsome features were eager. He was hatless, and went about, despite a light fog, without a waterproof in his rather shabby suit, the typical clothing already marking him out as eccentric.

"I say, Bassett—what a lucky meeting!" he began without preamble. "I want you to do something for me, will you? I've been trying to get in touch with Sir John Hardie, and I can't seem to do it. Can't get him on the wire, because he seems to have run over to Paris on business—and a telegram's too impersonal. Will you call him when he comes back and tell him from me that I've gone off to the Lofoten Islands and that I'll write to him from there?"

"Glad to," I said. "What's taking you off this time?"

"A corking legend really believed in, too, Bassett—that's the

splendid part of it. But I can't stop to tell you about it, because my machine's waiting and I must be off. Besides, I know enough to make me want to look into the matter. You know what these queer old beliefs do to me!"

I did know of Jason Warwick's fascination for strange beliefs existing in out-of-the-way places of the earth. "Supernatural again?" I asked, as he began to move away.

He half turned. "Nothing but that," he called back. "Very deep and sinister, Bassett—the shivery kind." Then he got into his Daimler and was gone.

Sir John Hardie returned from Paris shortly after Warwick had left England, and I found him quite easily at the Eton Club, of which both of us were members. Over liquor, I mentioned Warwick.

"He's gone to the Lofoten Islands. He left word with me for you said he'd write you about the place as soon as he got there. Which led me to believe that you had been discussing the islands with him before he went. Have I hit it? If so, what's sent him off like that?"

Sir John did not immediately reply. His eyes narrowed abruptly, and he ran a finger meditatively along the line of his jaw. "I wish he hadn't gone, Bassett," he said finally.

"Well," I put in, "if you mean that it's another wild goose chase, I'm inclined to agree."

Sir John shrugged. "I didn't mean that. In fact, Bassett, I'm suggesting just opposite; from vague hints that I've been gathering, it's beginning to strike me that perhaps the legend hanging about the island of Vömma, to which he's gone, may be something more than superstitious claptrap."

"What's the legend?"

"Nothing very clear, but certainly unusual, to put it mildly," replied Sir John. "The natives—good Norwegian stock, too—believe firmly in the existence of a deathless creature of some sort—some of them say it's a man; some are positive it's an animal—who is confined to the uninhabited island of Vömma."

"Deathless?" I cut in, perplexed. "What, exactly, is meant by that?"

"I don't know precisely. I gather that the thing's been seen by suc-

cessive generations, through at least four centuries, and naturally the belief that the thing cannot die, grew and continues to flourish "

"They've investigated, surely?"

Sir John nodded. "But not of late years. Something happened to some of them, and since then no one will go near the island."

"I looked Vömma up on a map of the islands I had sent to me, and it appears that it is quite near the MacIstrom—and God only knows what strange flotsam the sea might spew forth on the island! I've an uncanny idea that Warwick will find out more than he's bargained for. I've never cared about his unholy fascination for ancient superstitions and legends. I'm not exactly a fool, Bassett, but I don't think it's wise to push such interests too far; I think you know what I mean. Well, I'll look for letters from him; I daresay he'll be able to manage very well for himself. Nevertheless, I wish he hadn't gone."

More than that Sir John would not say. We parted after some small talk and I did not see him again until Warwick's return. As a matter of fact, Jason Warwick had been in London some time before any of his friends knew of his return from the Lofotens. I was the first to see him.

The meeting was accidental, and though it was very short, it left an indelible impression on my mind. I had gone into Selfridge's, and ran into Warwick standing near the main entrance, watching the stream of people passing in and out of the building with a curiously rapt interest. He did not notice me, even when I stepped directly into his line of vision. Perhaps I would have considered this fully as strange as it actually was, for Warwick had a reputation for extraordinary alertness, had it not been for the momentary excitement of coming upon him so suddenly, when to the best of my knowledge he was far from England.

I stepped up to him, put my hand on his arm, and said, "Well, Warwick—you're back!"

His reaction was astounding. He turned slowly and looked at me. His eyes were cold, and his face was perfectly expressionless. Then abruptly a change came upon his features; his expression grew some-



what intense, as if he were seeking by great mental effort to recall something long lost to memory. And then he spoke.

'Why, it's Bassett—of course. You've changed.'

I had not changed, and I knew it. It was he who had changed. He had gone away a light-hearted young man, and had returned as a cold, hard individual many years older. It was that that impressed me from the first: a baffling feeling of age emanating from the still youthful Warwick. What had happened to him in the Lofoten Islands to change him so? He was decidedly not the same man who had gone to the islands. Even his belated recognition of me came with obvious hesitation—as if he were forcing the words from his lips.

And somehow, too, his voice was harsher, deeper, colder. With an effort, I spoke to him again, hoping that I had masked my surprise.

"When did you get back?"

He wavered a stiff hand with an attempted airiness which did not quite come off, and said, "Oh, quite some time ago, Bassett. Some days."

"Well, you've kept yourself hidden, indeed. What's got into you?" I asked.

'Been very busy, Bassett.' He fell abruptly silent, and again that intensely thoughtful expression crept over his face. He passed a hand across his eyes. Then he said, again with effort, "Let me see—you are still at the same place, I think? Weren't there some letters—I wrote you——"

With some surprise, I said, "No, you wrote me no letters. I'm afraid you wrote only to Sir John Hardie, Warwick."

He did not apparently notice the surprise in my voice. His face lightened a moment. "Of course, it was Sir John. And where is he now, Bassett? Still at—

"His country place," I put in "Melcombe House, in Kent"

He nodded vaguely, but with some satisfaction manifest on his face. Then he took my hand in his, shook it stiffly, and began to walk rapidly away with long loping steps not at all characteristic of him. I was too surprised to follow, and the touch of his hand even more disturbed me, for it was cold and unfeeling as arctic stone!

From Selfridge's I went at once to my apartment, where I was spared the necessity of calling Sir John Hardie, as I had intended to do, for Sir John himself was waiting for me. I saw at a glance that he looked worried.

"I've come to see you about Warwick," he said at once. "I'm a little worried about him—afraid something's happened to him up there."

"I've just seen him," I cut in.

"Seen him!" exclaimed Sir John. "Where?"

"Why—in Selfridge's."

"Well, then at any rate, he's safe enough."

"But he's changed," I said, and went on to describe my strange encounter with Jason Warwick.

Sir John was considerably disturbed. "Seems he *has* run into something up there," he said at last. "I'll have to see him at once. I can't imagine his having forgotten his letters to me." He stopped abruptly and looked at me oddly. "Which reminds me that it was his letters I came to talk to you about."

He got up and walked across the room in silence once or twice.

"I didn't like the tone of his letters, for one thing," he said finally, coming to a stop before me. "Had me worried. They weren't very clear. He seemed excited—natural enough, I suppose. Then for a good time I had no letter at all from him. I was beginning to think that something had happened, and came here to talk to you, Bassett. But now that you've seen him I daresay he's all right."

But Sir John did not sound convincing. My story had bothered him as it continued to bother me. However, he evidently, did not wish to discuss Warwick's strange attitude until he had seen him and talked with him.

Thus the matter stood for a few days. I did not see Warwick again, and efforts to locate him at his usual haunts were fruitless. A call put through to Sir John's country place served to inform me that Sir John had spent the past days on the Continent, but was expected back within a few hours and had left word for me to run down for dinner that night.

That was on the third day after my encounter with Warwick.

So it was that I was down at Melcombe House when Sir John re-

turned from the Continent toward evening. That he was strangely disturbed I saw at once. What bothered him, however, he was loath to say, for nothing passed between us save desultory remarks upon his trip and the present unusually balmy weather.

It was long after dinner when I said finally, "Something's bothering you, Sir John. Why not tell me?"

He shrugged. "I want to get in touch with Warwick first," he said, adding, "if possible."

I did not press him. We were sitting at the time in his trophy room on the second floor. We sat there in silence for a considerable time, and finally I took up a book, seeing that Sir John was apparently not going to open his thoughts to me.

I think it was close upon midnight when there came an interruption. Quiet had descended upon the countryside, and a thin moon had risen. I was standing at the window when I heard someone in the floor below.

At first I thought it was Sir John's night watchman, Sullatt, and paid no attention to the sounds. It was not until somewhat later that it occurred to me that the sounds were not at all like those Sullatt would make—they were too stealthy, like creeping footsteps. This thought had no sooner occurred to me than the sound of another pair of advancing footsteps came from around one corner of the rambling house.

Then abruptly came a hoarse cry from below. "Robbers!"

"Sullatt!" exclaimed Sir John, coming quickly to the window and peering over my shoulders. The window was wide open, so both of us leaned out.

There, below us, on the lawn, some twenty feet from the house, stood a dark figure shouting at the top of his lungs: "Robbers in the library!"

Abruptly a dark form hurtled from the shadowy lower floor and launched itself straight across the lawn at Sullatt. The night watchman went down like a log; behind me Sir John whirled and I ran from the room.

I would have followed, but at the same instant someone else reached the library below and turned on the light—and I saw the face of the man who was struggling with Sullatt! Sullatt was on his back, his arms beating feebly upward, and his mysterious assailant was bending

over him, his shoulders oddly misshapen and hunched up, straining the clothes that seemed to bind his body—all this I saw as the light from the library streamed out across the lawn from the open French window. All this—and more. For as the light flashed forth and Sullatt lay quiet, the marauder looked up and at the house, his head thrown back, his mouth horribly distended, and his eyes glaring into the light—and it was *the face of Jason Warwick!*

A moment later he turned and vanished in the darkness beyond the hedge. Then I ran down the stairs, and came into the library just as Sir John was running out by way of the French window. The butler had preceded him to where Sullatt lay, and I was not far behind when he reached the body.

For body it was—Sullatt was dead, and his face as he lay there was awful to see. And despite the shortness of the time that elapsed between his sudden death and our coming, his body was rigid and cold as arctic stone!

Sir John turned away with a shudder, directing the butler in a low voice to summon the proper authorities and attend to the removal of the body. He passed me by without so much as a glance, but by the set lines of his face I knew that he had seen what I had seen—the face of Jason Warwick. And at the French window he stopped, turned on me, grasping my arm in a vise-like grip, and whispered in a harsh voice, "You saw—Warwick?"

I nodded.

"Say nothing." Then he went rapidly into the room, where evidence of the robbery still abounded in articles strewn about the furniture. He made a rapid survey.

"I hope your loss hasn't been too great, I ventured.

He looked at me oddly. "I haven't lost much," he said slowly. "In fact—I've lost nothing at all of value, it seems. Only a packet of letters was taken."

"Documents?"

"No, personal letters." Then he paused significantly, and added, "Letters Warwick wrote me from the island!"

It was only after the local police had finished with us that Sir John



was ready to explain. Even then he paced the floor for a long time before he said anything. But abruptly he came forward and stood bending over me, speaking in a harsh, excited voice not much above a whisper.

"That attack on Sullatt was a mistake—I believe it was meant for me, Bassett!"

My quick protest was interrupted by Sir John, who went on, speaking more rapidly. "Wait—remember that Sullatt looks much like me, same general portliness, height, carriage. Suppose someone wished to make a murderous attack on me—someone who knew only my general appearance—then such a mistake would be very easy to make."

I pondered this, and was forced to agree with Sir John. Then I spoke of what was uppermost in my mind. "You say Warwick's letters were taken—and we saw Warwick out there. And he surely would not make such a mistake as confusing Sullatt with you. Can you think of any reason for this mad occurrence?"

He nodded. "I think I can, Bassett. It is this—Jason Warwick is not the same man who went to the Lofoten Islands. Bassett, listen to me—I don't think he is Jason Warwick at all!"

Sir John paused only sufficiently to allow me to take in the statement he had just made; then he went on.

"And I'll tell you why, if you'll let me. The condition in which we found Sullatt has convinced me of something I've suspected for some hours now—say rather, something I've known, for I have proof, incontrovertible proof of something as incredible as I ever hope to know. Sullatt's body was cold as ice, and unbelievably rigid—but it wasn't the rigidity of *rigor mortis* because it came too soon for that. And the medical examiner didn't know what to make of that, as you know—but I think I do."

His voice was strangely tense, and his face was drawn.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Sir John made a rapid calculation on his fingers, then turned to me again. "Nine days ago—or ten, I think—there was committed on the Continent the first of a series of murders of which I hope that Sullatt's murder is the last. There have now been ten murders in all. First, there

was a man in Norway, then another in Germany, and two more in France. Then came the others—all here in England—a customs man at Dover, a guard at an isolated station at which boat trains invariably stop, two laboring men in outer London, a country gardener in Warwickshire, and now—Sullatt.

"And every one of these victims was found cold and rigid—just as we found Sullatt—and cause of death could not be determined except in one of two cases when onlookers had witnessed attacks like the shocking assault we saw made upon Sullatt!"

I felt that the incredible events that had occurred were to be eclipsed by a climax yet more incredible, but I did not fully understand, and said so.

Sir John cut me off impatiently. "It's plain as day, Bassett!" he exclaimed. "Those murders were committed along the route from the Lofoten Islands to London—the route Warwick must have taken on his return from Vömma—the route he must undoubtedly have taken at a time coincidental with those mysterious murders!"

"But, good God, Sir John—you don't believe for an instant that Warwick was responsible for all of them?"

"Let me remind you that I don't think we're dealing with Warwick. Check back to your meeting with him, for instance. He seemed to think to recall who you were. And then he asked about me, about where I was at the time. That isn't like the Warwick you and I knew before he went to the islands, is it?"

"No," I admitted reluctantly.

"And now my home is entered," he went on, "and Warwick's own letters—the letters he asked you about so guardedly—are stolen. And Sullatt, who looks like me, is murdered."

"What does it look like?—as if there were something the man we call Warwick wanted desperately to conceal, doesn't it? Something he thought the real Warwick might have written me from Vömma—thus both the letters and Sir John Hardie must be destroyed!"

He paused for a moment, and then added, "Surely it is too much to believe all this merely coincidence, Bassett?"

I nodded, glumly. Yet I was not convinced Sir John was withholding something vital to the puzzle.

"Yes, it's all logical enough, God knows," I said. "But what's behind it? You've intimated that you knew. If so, why not tell me?"

He paced for a few moments in silence; then abruptly he sat down, lowered his face to his hands, and sat there for a minute or two. At length he came to a decision.

"I may need your help, Bassett," he began, "and I think you ought to know the secret of Vomma Island—as much as I know of it. I haven't told the police of Warwick, and I warned you to say nothing, because it would do no good to set the police after him. You and I will have to face him and destroy him in our own way, and God forbid that we fail!" He shuddered as he spoke, communicating some of his inexplicable fear to me.

"You mean—we've got to kill him? Good God, Sir John, surely you aren't serious!" I protested.

"I am," he said. "Wait until you've heard what I've got to say, before you offer objections."

He took a moment in which to collect himself, and then began his incredible story.

"Some months ago, Warwick heard from one of his innumerable sources that a curious Lofoten legend was reputedly based on fact—a tale of a living-dead creature, of a soulless thing living entirely alone on a island of Vömma. I had heard this story many years ago, and I confess I could not take it as lightly as Warwick did. Believe me, Bassett, there are ancient forces of evil, unbelievable powers of abysmal darkness, existing in the cosmos—and sometimes they break through. I tried to prevent Warwick's going, but nothing would hold him back from the islands once he had heard the story.

"You know how abruptly he left. Well, I had a few scattered notes from him—as I told you. He wrote me how the Lofoten fishermen shunned the haunted island, going far out of their paths to avoid it even by day. Warwick went finally to see an old priest on the main land, and from this priest he evidently learned quite a bit. He dis-

covered first that already two men had been found dead—not at the same time, of course; I think there was almost a century between their deaths—and it was firmly believed that the thing on Vömma had done for them. Bassett, those men were found rigid and cold as stone, and there was nothing to show how they had come by their death!”

He leaned forward, lowering his voice. “When he heard the priest’s story, Warwick was naturally skeptical. He went in for the supernatural heavily, but he wasn’t a fool, by any means. He was determined to visit Vömma, even though everyone tried to dissuade him. The priest, when he heard of Warwick’s intention, came from his retreat to beg him not to go, repeating that the thing on Vömma was of elder evil, that already it had taken the soul of two others. And he warned him especially that if the thing should take one more soul, it would be free of the island to which it had for so long been bound—free to roam the earth at will, killing and slaying to satisfy its horrible appetite, gathering strength with each new soul theft. And it was deathless!

“Yet even this did not deter Warwick. But when the priest saw that his pleading did no good, he gave Warwick a sort of charm, ostensibly for his protection. Warwick took it, but I’m afraid he didn’t place much faith in it.

“Then he went to the island, arranging for someone to drop food fastened to a buoy quite a distance from the coast of Vömma, and to pick up anything he, Warwick, might leave there. From then on what happened is more or less indefinite, despite what I have tried to find out.

“I made some inquiries. Warwick’s strange silence caused me to send a wire inquiring after him. Apparently he did not go out to the buoy for food, but there is definite evidence that he did return some time after first going to Vömma. Then, just a few days ago, I learned that a letter for me had been picked up in a floating bottle, evidently some days after it had been dropped. This afternoon that letter was waiting for me on my return from the Continent, and with it was the charm that the priest had given Warwick.”

Sir John reached into his inner pocket and brought forth a somewhat crumpled envelope. “Only the marked portions are important,” he said.

I took the letter, asking, “How did this escape being taken tonight?”



"I had it in my pocket."

Then I turned my attention to the letter and began to read. It was the strangest document I have ever seen, and I do not expect ever to read a stranger. The letter was scrawled in Warwick's typically hurried hand, his great haste made apparent by frequent splotches of ink, erasures, and blocked-out sentences. I read, skipping all but the marked portions:

"My dear Hardie:

"The priest was right and you were right before him; I should not have come. When you read this, I shall be dead. If what I fear might come to pass has happened, you will undoubtedly think me mad. But ask yourself this question: Is this Warwick who has come back from Vömme the man I knew? You must answer, *No!* . . . The legend you already know. I did not believe May God forgive my skepticism! There are things of utter evil, ghastly beings beyond the knowledge of such puny minds as ours. Now, through my lack of foresight, my ironic disbelief, I have opened the door—and one of them has come through. . . .

"There is a man here. He has been living for centuries, yet has been dead for long ages. I should not have said a man *a thing*, vague as it is, is better. Because it can assume any shape it chooses—it can be man or animal, and it can, if it wants, be any definite person. It is a man now. It is a thing of cosmic evil in the shape of a man . . . Already this thing has taken two souls, but it needs a third before it can go forth. Do you understand, can you understand what that means? It can go forth into the world, this age old thing of evil, this thing that must have been on Vömme long before man inhabited the earth, this spawn of the Maelstrom, spewn forth a physical mass from the depths of the earth by the sea, and now inhabited by an animating spirit from the hellish cosmos, a spirit given pseudo-life and power by the souls of men. It can go forth into the world, almost deathless, eternal, and spread evil as its doctrine! . . . Only one thing can stop it; that is the charm, the five-pointed stone given me by the priest. But more of this later. . . .

"I came to Vömme last night, and at once I saw the thing slouching

along in the dark I was not afraid; I felt drawn to it. There is a hut here; it was built, the fishermen say, by one of their number long, long ago, the first man to die. I do not know anything definite about the early history of Vömma. To this hut I went, and there the creature followed me. It was unclothed. When I looked into its eyes beyond the window, for the first time I felt afraid. Its eyes were cunning, crafty, hard; that it had a living intelligence I could see at once—and so, too, the priest had said. It disappeared shortly after, but as the night wore on, I came gradually to know that I would never leave Vömma alive, that even now the creature was biding its time, waiting to strike at its leisure, to take from me the life essence, the essence of my being, and with this psyche to complete its own being. Such was the power of the creature's thought. . . .

"This morning I saw the thing at a distance. Already I had seen that my boat had been cut away. As it came closer, I saw something horrible. The creature had taken a shape familiar to me, even to its features—yes, Hardie, *the thing had begun to look like me!* When I saw that, there was no longer any doubt in my mind—only my death would release me from the terrible fear which preyed upon me. And my death must result because I had made two mistakes—I had failed in the first place to heed the priest and you, and more bitter, having disregarded all warning, I had neglected to bring with me the stone the priest had given me for my protection; I had left it at my boarding house on the mainland. . . . I am writing because of that stone, and because even now as you read this, this thing in my guise may have met you, conversed with you, may indeed be near you at this moment. And this thing that looks so like me must die, and you must be the emissary of its death. I have written a short note to the landlord of my lodgings on the mainland, telling him where to find the stone, giving him your address; he is to send it to you, and then you must do this for my sake and for all mankind.

"The five-pointed star has great power, an older power than that which created the thing on Vömma. It is a weapon used eons past, when the Elder Gods fought and conquered the hosts of evil for possession of Earth—so the priest has told me. It is a stone impregnated

with the power of these Elder Gods, and may God grant that none of this power has been lost! Somehow you must give this star-stone into the hand of the man who calls himself Warwick. I pray that the stone may reach you, and that the thing on Vómma will make its way in my guise to my home in London, there to meet my friends, for it shall have only as much of my memory as I choose to give it; for indeed, though it take the force that animates the physical mass called Jason Warwick, it cannot take the chambers of my mind unless I so desire. This, too, the priest warned—had I but listened! And yet, this thing may discover more, should he draw knowledge from you, or Bassett, or anyone who has known me. When the stone touches the man from the islands, then he—deathless, eternal one—he must die, he must return to the ever damned depths from which he first came upon earth. . . . Three souls he must have to give him spiritual substance, the power to escape, two he has had, and even now he is moving upon this hut from the north of the island. I am putting this in a bottle, together with the note to my landlord; some day it must reach you. I pray that the Lofoten fishermen will find it soon, will pick it from the sea before the thing can have got far from Vómma.

“WARWICK.”

I looked up at last, my startled incredulity evident on my features.

“But, surely, Sir John,” I protested, “this cannot be true!”

He shrugged his shoulders, reached suddenly into his pocket, and disclosed a five-pointed stone in his hand, looking like a star against his palm. It was not very large, not heavy, certainly—that I could see. On it was roughly drawn a smaller pentagon, and within this, a circular thing that looked like an eye. For some reason I had expected some kind of ornament that is readily associated with Christianity, but it was nothing even remotely connected with present-day religions that Sir John held in his hand; for the stone, though in all respects like a lifeless thing, gave off a definite atmosphere of incredible age, radiating it as if it were alive. There was, too, a sense of power that seemed to lie in the stone.

“That’s the charm,” murmured Sir John.

“Then you believe the story?” I asked.



He looked at me a moment before replying. Then he said, "Is there any other solution? Think back—apart from what your own personal experience, and what happened here tonight—think of the men who were killed. Why, the gardener in Warwickshire was on the estate bordering Warwick's own country place to the south— isn't that suggestive enough? Surely that alone must cast serious doubts upon your incredulity.

"But it isn't only that, Bassett. The story hangs together in all its details. Warwick—the real Warwick—wrote that his memory would not be as thorough in this new shape, or so the priest had warned him, at any rate. Your experience at Selfridge's confirms that—his inability to recognize you, and his questions about me—those questions followed by what happened here tonight. Surely you must see what is going on in the fragmentary mind of the ghastly thing that has come back from Vömma in the shape of poor Warwick's body! It's making an effort to destroy all evidence that Warwick might have put on paper—but it doesn't know about the stone, and we must use that against it in the only hope of destroying it forever.

"That's why I haven't told the police all we know of Sullatt's death—why I've concealed the part this thing has played, because then it would be wary. It could escape them easily, and go elsewhere, and the evil that is in it would still not be crushed. Even supposing Warwick's last letter to be the product of a maddened mind, and the events that happened since his trip to Vömma nothing more than a chain of extraordinary coincidences, it will do no harm to give the stone to the thing we call Warwick."

Still I hesitated.

"Come, Bassett," said Sir John. "You must agree to that."

"Very well," I replied finally. "I agree. We'll face him together when we can get him alone somewhere."

"And I'm afraid that will not be so easily done."

In that Sir John Hardie was correct. The thing that had assumed Warwick's body evaded us, sometimes inexplicably. In the course of the days that followed, two less more crimes, this time in widely separated



localities, were committed, making Sir John helplessly furious. But the end came more suddenly than either he or I had dared to hope.

The occasion was Lady Drayton's weekend party, to which she had asked Warwick at the request of Sir John. Our elation knew no bounds when she telephoned to say that Warwick's formal acceptance had just come through. Our sole desire that week-end was to come into contact with the elusive Warwick, and to prove, if possible, the ghastly assumption left as the only plausible solution to the change that had come over him since his return from the Lofoten Islands.

Even then, at the party, it was somehow not easy to meet him. During the first few meals at Drayton Hall, he excused himself; it was as if some subtle knowledge of our design had come to him. But the end was destined to come with surprising suddenness, despite Sir John's mounting fear that Warwick would again evade us.

It was on our last night at Drayton Hall, and Sir John and I were standing alone in the library of the newer wing of the Hall when the door opened softly and Jason Warwick stepped into the room. I swung around. I think I gasped aloud when Warwick's strange, depthless eyes looked darkly into my face. We stood there, I as if hypnotized, staring into eyes that I knew did not belong to the Warwick I had known!

Sir John broke the spell. "Will you join us, Warwick? Bassett and I were just about to go for liqueurs."

Warwick nodded with some reluctance. "Glad to," he muttered.

We went into the drawing room, Warwick taking the same loping steps that had first attracted my attention at Selfridge's. His movements were less stiff, less jerky than they were at that first surprising encounter. Had everything, after all, been fantasmal or had his movements changed because of those others that had died so strangely? Yet, as we settled ourselves there in the comfortable chairs, each holding a glass in his hand, I had a momentary impulse to discredit everything I had heard, even everything I had seen, and blurt out of the whole improbable story to Warwick. But strange, cold eyes, boring into us with an unnaturally eager intensity, dispelled any doubts I may have had.

Then something happened.

It came so swiftly that I had hardly time to notice the details. Sir John had drawn from his pocket a pack of cigarettes, and then began going through his clothes for his lighter. Not finding it, and inconvenienced by the pack he held in his hand, he thrust out his hand suddenly to Warwick, murmuring, 'Here, hold this a moment, old man.'

Instinctively Warwick took the pack of cigarettes. I shall never forget the change that came over him. His face went suddenly gray, and his body seemed to shrivel together in the chair. I saw his hand crumble suddenly away, and in a moment his face fell inward. In not more than one minute, a living thing died, fell together, and vanished—disintegrated before our eyes!

In the air was a sudden nauseating odor, and in the chair where the thing from the islands had been sitting lay the suit he had been wearing, together with a few sparse bones, white as lime and essentially unhuman in their structure—the last vestiges of an ancient body!

A living green flame glowing on the rug at our feet was the star stone Sir John had given the thing from Vòmnia in the pack of cigarettes.

## *The Carven Image*

My life has become hopelessly entangled in a web of strange occurrences, of which I have somehow become the focal point and at the same time the motivating force. I think the end of it all is not far away, and because I feel this way I am writing out this short account of what has thus far happened.

I was born and reared in the middle-western city which is the seat of the University of Wisconsin. Our house stood at the end of a short blind court, at one street corner of which stood the old home of the Skulds, a family that traced its American residence back to a pioneer who had come to America almost a century earlier and had erected the building. This structure was in itself a constant source of wonder to me as a child, representing as it did an architecture entirely foreign to anything which might conceivably be called American. It was built of wood in good Scandinavian tradition, much of it brightly painted in blue and green, with little turrets topping every corner, and the upper gables projecting. Yet, despite its pleasant appearance, there was something somber about the house, something for which the thick hedge of small pine trees which ran around three sides of it failed to account. On the fourth side was the lake front.

Each side of this dark hedge was broken into by stone gate posts and wooden gates, but it was only the front gate that interested me. The stones of one of these posts were laid in the shape of a hollow shell facing the street; in the niche thus formed stood the wooden figure of a woman. The memory of this wooden figure is the earliest and sharpest recollection of my childhood.

The carven image was that of Helsa, a forgotten goddess of the sea. She was, it was said, the creation of a small group of mariners whose eyes were turned away from the gracious Gods of their ancestors to other deities whose names were mentioned only in whispers. Helsa was supposedly one of these. The wooden figure stood on a low pedestal. She herself was painted in blue, the color of the sea. Her face was naturally colored a pinkish-white with carmined lips. Her intense eyes were blue as the sky, and her hair was a bluish yellow.

The expression on her face was peculiar, for it did not always seem the same to me. Sometimes it seemed merely to stare dully forth, as one would suppose a thing of wood to look. But at other times the strange blue eyes were alight with perception, the mouth seemed to curve slyly in a smile that belied the wood out of which it was carved. Occasionally, too, I fancied that her arms, which were crossed over her breast, moved ever so little.

When I was very small, I thought her merely a curiosity. I remember looking often at the image in childish wonderment, amazed that a thing of wood could be so like a person, unable to think it merely a doll with human proportions. But by the time I started school, my attitude began to undergo a change. My curiosity became mingled with awe, changed into an intenser wonder. I can not define this change, nor can I say what agency, if any, brought it about. I remember Helsa first as one being, then as another, and the transition is a blank, a movement unrecorded in my memory.

Since our court had but one entrance, and since my home was at its end, it was of course necessary for me to pass the carven image, even though I walked on the opposite side of the street. As a boy going to school I invariably walked on Skuldt's side, seldom with a thought for Helsa. But at dusk, when I returned from school, when the sun was setting or had set behind the wall of trees to the west, I was often impelled to cross the street, a faint repulsion for the somber Skuldt house and Helsa lingering in my mind. Often this action was entirely unconscious. Upon entering the court, I would veer abruptly to the right, and only after changing my course would I become aware that I was avoiding the sight of the carven image. I believe that this un-



conscious act came long before my actual antipathy for the image; I believe, in fact, that the antipathy I shortly developed was the internal admission of a subconscious fear that I had always held for it.

Is it strange, then, that from antipathy for the image I should grow to fear it? I did. And yet, perversely enough, with this growing fear grew a sense of intense liking for the carven image. My fear was always strongest at dusk, when Helsa's outlines were obscured by twilight, her face veiled in shadows, and when I imagined that her expression was definitely changing beyond the veil of darkness my eyes could not pierce. As I reached adolescence, and understood to what proportions my childish antipathy had grown, I attempted to reason with myself. In consequence, I occasionally forced myself to pass the Skuldt estate. Yet this did no good, for I never passed the carven image without feeling a definite relief at having left it behind. It is not strange that under such strain the carven image of Helsa should attain in my mind a reality which it did not have. Still I persisted in passing the goddess, and at last I felt that I had conquered my adolescent fear. One evening late in November I came from school and stopped before the image in the niche. My fear had almost entirely vanished, and I had no hesitation in standing there to look at Helsa.

In the darkness her deeply shadowed face was startlingly light, and her eyes seemed alive. I stared boldly at her, beginning to feel amusement at the memory of my childish fear. And then, in the gloom, I saw her hands move. I saw her fingers open, the arms stretch out. At the same moment the black mouth widened in a smile.

I turned and fled instantly.

I remember that I rushed wildly into the house, crying with an odd insistence, "Helsa is alive! Helsa is alive!" as if I had all along entertained this fantastic thought. The result was that I was marched straight back to the carven image and shown in the light of my father's flash lamp that Helsa could not possibly be alive. Furthermore, I was mildly punished, and after my father's insistent statement that I had imagined Helsa's movement, I ultimately convinced myself that I had.

In many ways that early event was fortunate for me. My father's firm conviction gave me the same conviction, and from that time on

I found myself looking upon my fear for Helsa as a part of childhood left for ever in the past.

With college came absorption in new matters, and an even completer growing away from the things of childhood. My work was in philosophy, and it was through this study that I met and learned to know Doctor Stengler, one of the foremost philosophers in the university. When I was a senior and well on in my studies, he began his book, *Thought and Matter*, and to my inestimable pleasure, he asked me to assist him in the technical matters of annotation and bibliography. It was through this work that I came into a thorough command of the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley and the entire school that followed him; thus I came myself to believe that there was much in the theory that the world of realities as we know it is non-existent, that everything exists only as a projection of the individual's thought. Thus, too, I came to understand the power of thought, the theory that "thoughts are things," and this opened up suggestive fields before me.

By the end of my last year at college Doctor Stengler had completed his research, and had only to finish the book. Deciding that there were places more congenial for composition than our city, he obtained leave of absence for two years and left for Europe.

In the meantime, I was graduated and had accepted a minor position on the staff of the philosophy department of the university. A year passed and I was offered a larger appointment, which I promptly accepted. It was this appointment that enabled me to take the single step necessary for the completion of my happiness: marriage to the woman I loved.

Elissa Hardy had come into my life when first I entered college. She was everything that I was not; calm and collected, coolly beautiful, tolerant. In appearance she was tall and willowy, with a slim body that was as supple as it was lovely. Her shapely head was finely poised; her hair flaxen, her eyes a luminous gray. For five years I worked only for her, awaiting with impatience the day on which I might marry her.

In June of my first year as an instructor at the university I was offered the advance of which I have written. That night I went to Elissa, and that night she consented to marry me. I left her home, walking, as

tradition has it, on air. The life that stretched out before me was filled with endless promise. I was so happy that I walked home with exaggerated slowness, drinking in the night, which, as a reflection of my own pleasure, seemed heavenly. Then suddenly, crowding through my happiness, came the sharp and disturbing impression that I was being followed. I wheeled. There was no one on the street.

Somewhat chilled, I went on, walking faster. Again I was sure that I heard footsteps behind me, footsteps adjusting their pace to mine with sinister deliberation. This time I looked about me more carefully, but again there was nothing to be seen. I began to feel that I was the victim of a strange illusion. Yet, by the time I reached home, my happiness had taken flight, and I was oppressed by an inexplicable sense of impending danger. And when I went to bed I felt a distinct suggestion of disaster lurking in the background.

I do not know how long I slept before I was awakened by a tapping at my window. In my semi-conscious state I immediately assumed that a storm had come up and that the tapping was but a branch of one of the great pine trees outside striking against the pane. But the insistence of the tapping was too disturbing for the branch of a tree, and the regularity of the sound convinced me that it was made by some other agency. Then, coming suddenly awake, I noticed that there was no wind outside, and that the noise was made by a hard surface, possibly metal. For a moment I lay quiet. Then I slipped noiselessly from the bed, crept to the window, and opened it.

The grounds were bathed in a misty radiance coming from the beclouded moon above, but there was no one beneath the window. I looked at the low-hanging branches of the closest trees; they were quiet. Then abruptly I saw a dim figure keeping close to the darkest shadows. A momentary patch of moonlight revealed a familiar face, then it was gone. Who was it, man or woman? I did not know, but this time it was not an illusion. I had very definitely seen some one, some one familiar both in feature and cloaked shape. For a moment I continued to stand at the window, and as I stood there I had the distinct impression that some one hidden in the darkness beyond was endeavoring to communicate soundlessly with me.



Then a message came through as clearly as if some one had repeated it aloud. There was no apparent explanation of the phenomenon, but its strange delivery was forgotten in the shocking import of the message that came as a warning from the darkness —You must not marry Elissa Hardy!

The rest of the night my sleep was fitful and dream-haunted.

Despite my nocturnal belief in what I had seen, I laughed at my experience in the morning. As I dressed, as I ate my breakfast, I thought that the whole thing had been a dream, that I had really heard and seen nothing except in a dream. In my world, I decided over my coffee, shadows had no place, for fate had thus far been kind to me, and every indication pointed to further kindness.

How much better had I heeded that strange warning!

After breakfast, as usual, I spent some time pottering about with plants and shrubs in my garden. I paused under my bedroom window, where I had recently planted several new bushes; but my attention was almost immediately diverted from the bushes by definitely outlined footprints in the damp ground. My surprise was heightened when I noticed that the prints had not been made by feet encased in shoes. There were no marks of heels, which would have sunk into the soft ground, nor were there marks of soles. Then abruptly I saw a clear print in the ground next to the bushes. In the loose earth I saw that the foot had indeed been bare, for there were the outlines of five toes, and the shape of the print left no doubt that the footsteps had been made by a woman! And it was easy to see that she had stepped lightly.

So I had not been dreaming in the night after all.

On my way to classes an hour later I happened to meet the caretaker of the Skuldt estate; he was trimming the pine hedge when I passed. The family being at this time in Europe, the house had been closed except for the caretaker's cottage on the lake shore behind.

"Good morning, sir," he greeted me.

"Hello, Jenks."

The old man straightened up with some difficulty, obviously bursting to speak further to me. "Did you hear anything around here last night?" he asked.



I hesitated. Then, "Why, no, Jenks, nothing that I remember. Anything wrong?"

"Some one's been having fun around here." He beckoned me solemnly toward the front gates. "Look at that!" he exclaimed with exasperation in his voice. "Kids, I s'pose."

He was indicating the carven image. I looked at it and saw that the statue had been moved on its pedestal. Then I saw the direction of its wooden gaze. Was it coincidence that Helsa was turned in the direction of my house?

"Some one's moved it," I said.

"You bet they did. And got it dirty."

"Dirty?" I echoed.

He nodded. "And now I'll have to wash it. See that?" He moved closer and pointed again.

I looked at the bottom of the statue, at the folds of the wooden robe that fell toward the five bare toes that showed beneath. With an inexplicable feeling of fear, I saw clinging to robe and toes a little loose black loam—like that in which the bushes beneath my bedroom window were planted!

Jenks spoke again, asking me to help him move the statue back into place, since he supposed from its size that it was too heavy for one man to handle. Together we put our arms around the image, but we had hardly touched it when it became obvious that the figure was very light, that it was hollow, and that one man could easily move it. Was it my imagination that made me feel for a fleeting moment that the wooden robes of the carven image seemed to cling caressingly to me, as we moved the image back into place together?

I went to my work definitely disturbed, and spent the next few days apprehensively pondering the strange warning that had come to me, and its aftermath. But my approaching marriage to Elissa Hardy finally drove all thought of the carven image from my mind—until the frightening memory of the sea goddess once more crashed into my consciousness.

On the eve of my wedding a tapping at my window again awoke me. This time I came awake at once, but fearing what I might see, I

hesitated to open the window. The tapping on the pane continued, more insistently than ever; it was as if the intruder knew that I had awakened. At last I got up, not without trepidation, threw open the window, and looking out into the black night, saw again that vaguely familiar figure, saw that white face flashing across my vision. Then it was gone. The June night wind, cool and fresh, blew into the room. And once again I had a distinct message: You dare not marry, for you belong to me!

I slept no more that night.

It was a drawn-faced bridegroom that Elissa Hardy took as her husband at noon the next day. Yet, despite the shadowy figure of the carved image lurking in the background, I returned from our two-months' honeymoon in the early part of September with my happiness unadulterated by any alien fear. But we had not been at home two weeks when the greatest catastrophe of my life occurred, robbing me at one ghastly stroke of the promise of my future.

At dusk one night Elissa and I went boating. The day had been hot and the breeze that blew over the lake was refreshing. We had not been out long when the clouds that had been lowering on the horizon pulled themselves up over the sky, and the breeze that had been blowing all day changed to a sharp wind that drove the smooth water of the lake into choppy, white-capped waves. Our boat began to rock violently, but we were not alarmed, for we were not far from shore and the wind was not yet violent enough to endanger us.

I had turned immediately upon the rising of the wind, and was heading for shore, when suddenly something solid struck the boat a terrific blow from below, and in a moment we were overturned and struggling in the water. At the same moment it began to rain torrentially. Yet I was not alarmed, for I knew Elissa was a good swimmer.

Then abruptly Elissa disappeared, jerked beneath the surface with the suddenness of a cork on a line weighted by a fish. I struck out for the spot where she had vanished, and immediately the wind and the waves widened the distance between the boat and me. Elissa reappeared suddenly, struggling madly, and I spurted forward. Then once again she went down, and came up no more. I made a desperate attempt to find

her by diving beneath the waves, but only exhausted myself until I felt I would never reach shore alive; for, far as it was, the shore was now closer than the overturned boat. I felt myself losing ground. I swallowed large mouthfuls of water. Just as I was on the verge of losing consciousness, I became aware of strong arms about me, and saw a familiar face. Then I sank into unconsciousness.

Not quite an hour later I came to myself on the shore of the lake—fully ten feet away from the water. The storm was over, and though the lake was still rolling against the shores, it was considerably calmer than it had been during the storm. I looked around me, and saw that I lay on the Skuldt estate. Then, feeling my wet clothing, I recalled with horror the catastrophe that had taken Elissa from me. I stumbled to my feet and ran along the lake to my own house, where the lone servant in the kitchen had just laid two places for the night's dinner.

How I got through the remainder of that ghastly night is beyond memory. Just before dawn Elissa's body was recovered, and at once I found myself subjected to sharp and bewildering questions: for there were scratches and bruises on her lovely body, as if she had fought some one just before death came. My own horror was far greater than that of those who questioned me, and it was perhaps largely my sincerity that convinced them that the strange marks upon Elissa's body were the result of being buffeted against the overturned boat. I alone knew that Elissa had been thrown clear of the boat, had not once come near it from the moment of its overturning to the time of her death!

I could not tell the truth I had guessed, for I recalled the familiar face next my own in my last moment of consciousness in the turbulent waters, and recognized it as that of Helsa, the carven image at the front gates of the Skuldt estate. I could no longer deny that there existed a definite life-force which animated Helsa. And for some reason the strange unearthly force inhabiting this wooden thing had attached itself to me with an unholy fixity which brooked no interference! For Helsa had drowned Elissa, just as she had saved me, and it had been Helsa, too, who had warned me twice before the wedding that I must not marry. Only now did I realize most bitterly how much better it would have been if I had heeded these phantom warnings.



But by what means had Helsa come to life? I recalled vaguely-rumored stories of the black sorcery supposedly believed in and practiced by those old Scandinavian families, one of whose deities Helsa had been. Could there have been something in those old stories? Then I recalled my own study in philosophy, the ideas of Bishop Berkeley, in belief that the only reality existed in the mind. I thought of the theory that "thoughts are things," and with growing horror I realized that my childish regard for Helsa, my adolescent fear of her, had endowed her with a frightful life force, a power that had become possessive, allowing no one to attach herself to me, allowing me to become attached to no one!

I tried several times to disbelieve the theory of Helsa's life-force, but I could not; so I set about thinking how I could deliberately test my theory, and if I could prove its reality, how I could remove this evil I had so unwittingly brought to influence my existence. Doctor Stengler, whose book was not completed, had returned; and after some hesitation, I went to to him with my problem. He welcomed me, and I told him everything that had occurred, stating the obvious conclusion.

When I had finished, he looked at me in amazement, his brown eyes wide. He forced a smile and said, "You must be wrong, Speers."

"Wrong!" I exclaimed. "That from you, you who have always taught these philosophies?"

Doctor Stengler smiled. "You are wrong in that, at least. I have never taught the philosophy from which your conclusion springs; I have but attempted to outline its development, to explain its existence. Even in thought and matter I make no attempt to assert its credibility."

I came to my feet. "Whether you have ever cared to admit its credibility before now does not interest me, Doctor. I'm speaking to you not as to a learned man but merely as to an intelligent friend. Tell me if my explanation, so far as my experience is concerned, is not entirely credible."

Doctor Stengler matched his finger tips and pursed his lips. He looked up at me. "And if I do admit it as credible, what then?"

"Then you must tell me what to do. You must show me how I can cut loose from this frightful influence."



Doctor Stengler spoke again, and I sensed a more kindly intonation in his voice "If what you have told me is indeed true, then I believe you are right. You have given the thing a hideous life by your constant thought of it; the fear you have held for it in your mind has come into actual existence, and the thing has progressed so far as to want to control you, to feel an emotion, a human emotion distorted by the thing's warped vision, an emotion of ghastly love for you, who have created its life!"

For a moment I could not speak. Doctor Stengler had pointed out the salient factor of which I had remained in ignorance. The thing not only attached itself to me, but attached itself as a possessive lover, a furiously jealous thing fixed to its unwitting creator with a blind and hopeless passion!

"Good God!" I murmured. "I understand more fully now. Yes, everything I told you is true. I am as certain of that as I am of my presence here."

"Then the image must be destroyed, the focal point of its being wiped out, so that the force you have created can escape and die, having no longer a material counterpart. I believe that is the only way of escape."

I said nothing.

"And I further believe," he continued, "that it should be destroyed by fire. I think you had better try to buy it from old Skuldt. Then, once you possess it, lose no time in burning it."

I left my friend's home with a lighter heart. But my problem was not yet solved, for I learned soon enough that old Skuldt would under no circumstances sell his wooden image. It was very old, and it had been in the family for over two hundred years. Besides, there were strange legends clustered about its worn figure, and there existed the belief among certain members of the family that the goddess served as a protective deity. I shuddered at his suggestion of strange legends about Helsa.

As I passed out through the front gate, my eyes were drawn to Helsa's wooden face. There was a slight smile on her mouth, benign, yet contemptuous. Had that smile always been there—had it been there

before I could not remember distinctly, but a warning sense of danger told me no. I hurried directly back to Doctor Stengler.

That was last night.

When I told Doctor Stengler of my unsuccessful interview with old Skuldt, his face darkened with dismay. "Too bad, too bad," he muttered.

"Now what? I asked distractedly. I was virtually helpless; I needed some one to make my decisions, to point out my path for me

"I would wait," said the professor finally.

"Wait for what?" I demanded almost angrily. "More horrors? More of this unbearable anxiety?"

He flushed "Need I suggest that your next step must necessarily be illegal? The image must be burned; how you do it is after all a personal matter."

I laughed bitterly "Elissa's death was hardly legal. How can I hesitate to destroy the thing that brought about her death?"

The professor urged me into a chair. "All right. But wait a few days. Perhaps in the intervening time we'll find another solution."

He continued to soothe me with his mild voice, and soon convinced me that I should wait. I agreed finally, and left his house, dog-tired.

Would God that I had not agreed! Would God that I had gone directly to the Skuldt estate last night and smashed the image of that hellish goddess to bits and burned them! How much better would it have been if I had not listened to Doctor Stengler, who, in advising me to wait, signed his own death warrant!

How was I in my intense haste and trouble to know that I had been followed from the Skuldt gates? I heard no footsteps, I saw nothing behind me, I felt no phantom presence, though once or twice before I had heard the pursuing thing, though I had failed to see it.

The police came for me not three hours after I had reached my home. I had been the last person to see him alive, for he had been murdered in his study. He, famous philosopher and author, a man without a known enemy in the world, had been ruthlessly slain—beaten to death by an unknown antagonist who carried what must have been a heavy, blunt, wooden weapon, for it was with such a weapon that Doctor

Stengler had been brutally killed.

It was I who had killed my friend; for I had given life to Helsa, and surely there could be no question of her hand in the crime! She had taken her revenge on the man who had shown me the way to escape her influence. Once more the carven image had killed.

All day, from midnight on, I have been before the police, stating and restating what I was doing in Doctor Stengler's house last night. The grueling was endless. If I was weary last night, I am near exhaustion now. What horror this wooden image has brought into my life! If I had heeded her first nocturnal warning, Helsa might have allowed both Elissa and Doctor Stengler to live.

I need not have gone to the Skuldt estate to convince myself of Helsa's part in the death of my friend, yet I went when finally the police released me. It was as if I were drawn there by a powerful magnet. And I was not surprized to see that her bare arms were stained with blood. What there may have been of benignity in her face had fled. Her enigmatic smile was twisted into a mocking leer of hate.

My very life sustains her! There is no further need to wait.

I am going now.

\* \* \* \* \*

The preceding paper was found in the home of the late Emmanuel Speers by police investigating his death, a clipped newspaper account of which is here appended:

Emmanuel Speers, instructor in the philosophy department of the University of Wisconsin, was last night strangely murdered while apparently committing an act of vandalism. His body was found by members of the family of Karl Skuldt of 2231 Mendota Court returning from a play.

The dead man lay directly before the front gate of the estate, and the picturesque statue which has always stood in a niche in one of the gate-posts was found across his body. The carven image was almost entirely burned.

Evidence indicated that Mr. Speers had liberally covered the image with gasoline, and then set fire to it. In falling from its pedestal, the image evidently killed Mr. Speers, though

this is remarkable in view of the fact that the figure was extraordinarily light for its size.

There were mysterious marks about Mr. Speers' throat, and two doctors who have examined him have stated that his death might have been due to strangulation.

It is a remarkable fact that the remains of the arms of the sea goddess, which were normally resting against her shoulders, were found stretched and bent in unnatural positions.

To this brief clipping may be added the fact that two days after Speers' burial beside the body of his wife, the half-burned arms of the sea goddess were found thrust deep into the earth of his grave. The arms were removed from the grave and carried into the small cottage of the cemetery caretaker. One of the arms was burned in the course of the day; the other was left for the night.

The remaining arm was burned immediately after its discovery in the morning of the following day deep in the disturbed earth of Speers' grave. The window of the caretaker's tiny cottage had been broken from the inside.



## *The Pacer*

Mr. William Larkins adjusted his monocle with a very determined air. Then he brushed an imaginary thread from his lapel, raised his eyebrows slightly, and turned to the house agent, still talking volubly.

"It is people in my business, Mr. Collins," said Mr. Larkins somewhat icily, "who start rumors of this sort. This is by far the most desirable of the houses you have yet shown me, and I am determined to take it for the winter at the price you quoted me."

"You authors are a funny lot," answered the agent somewhat testily. "But we take no responsibilities—especially in regard to anything out of the ordinary that may happen while you're in the building."

Mr. Larkins regarded the agent for a moment; then he removed his monocle, polished it, and returned it to his eye. The agent shuffled his feet nervously. "I should think that the modern businessman would have something else on his mind than stories of haunted houses," remarked Mr. Larkins dryly.

Mr. Collins became suddenly apologetic. "It's not that we believe these things, Mr. Larkins," and he spread his hands and smiled deprecatingly, "but the amount of complaints we've received from other people who've rented this place can't be entirely disregarded. Then there's that closed room—a lot of people object to that, but one fellow opened it, and—well, he died shortly after." Mr. Collins coughed.

"It will not be necessary that I use the second floor at all," put in Mr. Larkins. "So you need have no fear about that closed room. As long as it doesn't bother me, I'll not bother the room."

"Of course," said Mr. Collins, and "Of course," again, and would perhaps have gone on, but Mr. Larkins interrupted him.

"If I may ask, on what are these rumors based?"

"Just noises — as if someone were walking around up there." The agent made a vague sort of gesture that included the entire second story.

"I see," said Mr. Larkins thoughtfully.

"Of course, all these stories go back to the time when John Brent lived here," the agent went on.

"You refer to the scientist Brent? The man who died insane?" asked Mr. Larkins, absently tapping the wall with his stick.

"Yes, that's the man. Perhaps you knew him, Mr. Larkins?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Collins. It is not a practise of mine to associate with people who are slightly unbalanced mentally. I can say that I remember him, however; the man and his ridiculous theories attracted quite a bit of public attention."

"He died here in this house."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Larkins, for the first time showing interest. "And is it his ghost that walks?"

"No! No! Mr. Larkins. It's quite a different story, we none of us fully understand it, and it's supposed that this man Brent had a hand in what's haunting the house."

"Something to do with one of his theories?"

"Yes, that's it. I'm not quite sure what it's all about, Mr. Larkins, but I can find out, if you wish."

"Oh! no, don't go to any trouble. The matter doesn't worry me in the least, Mr. Collins. It's merely a passing interest. Don't trouble yourself."

"As far as I know," continued Mr. Collins, "it had something to do with some theory about drawing spirits out of the ether — or some such idea."

"I think I've heard of it," interrupted Mr. Larkins. "I understand it was quite a success."

"I couldn't say, Mr. Larkins, I'm sure I couldn't say."

"No," said Mr. Larkins rather sharply, "I didn't suppose you could. But as I said before, the matter is inconsequential, of very little impor-

tance, indeed, and I believe that we can dismiss it. Shall we, Mr. Collins?"

"Oh! yes, Mr. Larkins. Yes, sir; of course."

"Good!" said Mr. Larkins, and was about to go on, when the agent interrupted him.

"And you're still certain you want this house?"

"Quite," said Mr. Larkins in a cold voice edged with reproof. "And the sooner, the better. In fact, I suggest that we attend to the matter at once, without further delay."

"Anything you say, Mr. Larkins."

"Very good. We shall go at once."

Mr. William Larkins' forte was the romantic novel, and he had just succeeded in arousing the literary critics of the Continent to a sense of his importance. At the appearance of his first book they hailed him as "Just another new writer," which so irritated Mr. Larkins that he produced his masterpiece, *Ysola*, which caught and held the veneration of such capable men as Alonso Compson of the *Mirror*, to say nothing of Carlo Jenkins of the *Times*.

Mr. Larkins was engaged on his third novel, *Island Gods*, when he discovered the necessity of quiet and unassuming winter quarters. Whereupon he departed at once for St. John's Wood, a section of London that he had before been pleased with. Not quite a week later, he descended with his belongings on Number 21 and took quiet possession.

Mr. William Larkins had quite forgotten all about the rumors concerning the haunting of Number 21, when the matter was brought to his mind in a very irritating manner. It was six days after he had taken up occupation, and Mr. Larkins was engaged on his new novel—as a matter of fact, he had just succeeded in depositing his hero on a desert island, with no immediate thought of how to rescue him—when he became aware of a most annoying disturbance on the second floor. For a moment Mr. Larkins forgot his surroundings, he began to curse the tenants above under his breath in no very genteel manner. But suddenly he bethought himself of the emptiness of the floor above. It

took him some moments more to think of the rumors he had heard from the agent.

Mr Larkins was distinctly not a believer in any form of the supernatural. For some time he sat very still, listening. The sound seemed to be that of a man pacing to and fro in a narrow space; Mr. Larkins had a mental picture of the closed room. The pacing was not, however, very regular; it was punctuated at odd intervals by a furious pounding sound as if the tenant were hammering on the door or the walls, reflected the author. Usually such an interval was followed by a curious padding sound, as if the tenant were running in a circle around the room. Eventually this resolved into the steady pacing, which became to Mr. Larkins more and more monotonous as he sat there listening.

Another of Mr. Larkins' attributes was an unshakable bravery. Torn between the impossibility of writing with such an annoying disturbance above his head, and investigating, leaving his hero to languish for some unpremeditated hours on the island, Mr. Larkins decided upon the latter course. Arming himself with a revolver and a flashlight, he made his way carefully into the hall and up the stairs. The first door to his right as he mounted the last step was that of the closed room. Before this room he paused, listening. Certainly it was from here that the sound came. It was more subdued now, but still recognizable. Mr. Larkins argued with himself: should he enter, or not? The agent's warning came to his mind. He decided that, just as a matter of surety, he would look into the other rooms first.

There was nothing in them, and when he had finished, the annoying pacing had stopped. Consequently Mr. Larkins decided to put off his investigation of the closed room until he had fortified himself with more data in regard to the late Brent and his theories. Mr. Larkins was not admitting to himself the possibility of the supernatural; he was still convinced that there was something perfectly natural behind this disturbance. In any event, he reflected, it would do no harm to know a little more about the house. He resolved on the spur of the moment to look up the case of the man who had died after opening the closed room.

In accordance with his decision, Mr. Larkins descended to his floor



and went directly to the typewriter, where he removed his hero bodily from the machine. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to the late Mr Brent's co worker, Jonathan Roberts.

On the following day Mr Larkins wandered casually down to the offices of the *Times*, where he spent a considerable part of the afternoon. He emerged at last, and he carried under his arm a number of newspapers. When he reached Number 21 he was pleasantly surprised to find that Mr Jonathan Roberts had replied to his letter of the preceding night by special messenger.

It was the letter, quite a lengthy document, which first engaged Mr. Larkins' attention. Of special interest were these paragraphs, constituting the latter half of the letter.

Those are a number of his theories, which I have come to regard as fully as ridiculous as the press regards them. But I believe the particular theory you refer to is his theory of the predestination of souls. This was engrossing his attention at a time when I was spending some weeks at Liverpool, in attendance upon my mother, who was, at the time, seriously ill. However, I will tell you what I can in regard to the theory.

It was his idea that such places as heaven and hell did not exist for the soul, he did not mean to say that he believed that good and evil were also non-existent for the soul after death. On the contrary, his entire theory hinged on this point. He believed that all souls, good and bad alike, were projected into the ether at the moment of death, to roam there for the remainder of their existence, to which he designated no end. For the good souls happiness abounded; for the evil, only evil.

He developed this theory by advancing another; that since these souls were merely passing to and fro in the ether, it would be a comparatively easy thing to draw them back, if one had a body to put them into. The last time I saw him—just before I left for Liverpool—he had actually found a young man who had consented to his plan of driving from the subject's body his soul, and drawing another from the ether to replace it.

He admitted that the chief argument against this latter theory was, in the light of his first theory, that in drawing a soul from the ether, one could make no distinction between a good and evil soul. Also, one could not tell to what propor-

tions the evil and good had expanded. He believed, as many of us do, that evil breeds evil, and he said he had the chance of one in a hundred of drawing a soul of cosmic evil from the ether. In my presence, one day, he made certain vague references to ancient gods of evil—I candidly admit that what he said went over my head.

How this experiment of his came out, I can not say. It was the last he worked, for he was dead when I returned from Liverpool. The papers contained no mention of it; he himself, in his letters to me—letters, often as not, very incoherent—was very sparse with information regarding it. I gathered, however, that the experiment was a success, or that he believed it so; most likely the latter, for to admit the former would be to admit his grossly improbable theory to the realm of the probable. Beyond that I can say nothing. I don't think he ever gave me the name of the young man, for I should certainly have looked him up. It was consistently my idea that the fellow was a derelict, or surely his relatives would have some knowledge of him; or, having none, would certainly raise a devil of a row over his disappearance.

I was under the impression also, from his letters, that Brent kept a diary in his last days, but I could find nothing at the time when I looked about Number 21 after his death. However, I remember being in a rush; if you searched, you might find something of interest.

Another thing that rather puzzles me: have you ever wondered about that peculiar bare spot beneath the lilac bush at the back of the house?

Very Cordially yours,

JONATHAN ROBERTS.

P. S. If you should want me, call Picadilly 49-A.

The last paragraph of the letter caught Mr. Larkins' eye; he resolved to investigate the matter the first thing in the morning, regretting somewhat that dusk had fallen so early. The mention of a diary, too, stimulated his interest; he mentally noted that this was another factor to absorb his attention on the following day.

Then he gave his attention to the newspapers, going over them one by one and discarding them. From the last he clipped a column which

contained a summary of the affair; this clipping he placed beside the letter and proceeded to reread it:

LONDON, August 7 The death of Mr. Holman Davitt at Number 21 St John's Wood was last night declared due to heart failure caused by severe shock. Physicians in charge of the inquest were led by the Honourable Seymour Lawlor.

Mr Holman Davitt was found dead at his lodgings on August 1. He was found at the foot of the stairs under circumstances that aroused immediate suspicion and caused an investigation to be made. Nothing, however, was discovered, save that Mr. Davitt seemed to have fallen down the stairs, as several bruises on his body indicated. There were no broken bones. Doctors were loath to declare death due to failure of the heart because Mr Davitt's attending physician, Dr. Sax Borden, declared his condition tip-top.

It is Dr. Lawlor's opinion, as expressed at the final inquest last night, that Mr Davitt died of fright; Dr. Borden, on the other hand, cites specific instances of Mr. Davitt's bravery and nerve. A peculiar feature of the affair is the curiously hardened and cold condition of the corpse; it is still in the condition in which it was discovered.

By way of mention, Number 21 was the residence of the late John Brent, who was found dead under very similar conditions.

Mr. Larkins pondered over the excerpt for a moment, then he took up the letter and began to reread it. He noticed with gathering astonishment that neither the clipping nor the letter made mention of the closed room. Did the matter seem too flippant for the respective writers? Or was it merely an oversight? The closed room, as something of importance, began to deteriorate in the eyes of Mr Larkins.

But he could not escape the fact that the body of Mr Davitt had been found at the foot of the stairs, down which he had evidently fallen. And Dr. Lawlor had mentioned fright. Mr Collins, the agent, had said that the tenant died soon after opening the door of the closed room. Perhaps it was quite possible—Collins deceived him. Mr Larkins observed that Mr. Davitt might very well have died the same night he opened the door. Could it not then be possible that something in that room so frightened Mr. Davitt as to bring on heart failure? Mr



Larkins admitted it to himself; he was much disposed to believe it. It would be natural for a realtor to suppress any such story, of course.

A clock on the mantel struck 10 and Mr. Larkins shot an enlightened glance toward his bed chamber. He rose, stretched himself, and yawned. He placed the letter and clipping under a paperweight on the top of his table, where he would not fail to see them first thing in the morning. As he turned the light out, he reflected with a half-smile, that the hero of *Island Gods* was still languishing on a desert isle.

Mr. Larkins rose much earlier than usual the next morning but since it was Sunday, he had first to go to mass. Directly on his return he went out into the garden behind the house. At the end of the cobblestone walk he found the lilac bush, and beneath it the spot that Roberts had mentioned. He stopped and frowned down at it. It was nothing more than a vague, irregular patch of ground on which the grass grew very sparsely, in scraggly clumps of thin blades, which appeared at first to be dried, but were instead of some dark color that Mr. Larkins could not identify. To Mr. Larkins it seemed at first glance only the usual bare space that one finds in places where the sun does not shine, where there is continual shadow. Mr. Larkins polished his monocle meditatively and screwed it into his eye. Then, looking upward, he caught the line of the lilac bush. It was then that he noticed that the bare spot was not directly under the bush—certainly it was not always in its shadow. Mr. Larkins bent to one knee to inspect the area more closely.

In no place under the bush was the grass exceptionally heavy; the strange thing was that the barest spot was that at the extreme outer edge and that it must be this portion that Robert had reference to. Mr. Larkins cast a sudden glance at the sky; in less than an hour the sun would be shining directly upon the spot before him. With an exclamation, he bent again to the scrutiny. Then he noticed that there was a suggestion of definite form to the spot, despite the inroads of grass: something more distinct than he had at first imagined. It was a shape inexplicably suggestive of something he knew—something he could recognize.

Then suddenly he started up; his monocle fell from his eye and swung on its ribbon. He bent forward once more. Yes, certainly, it



was as if a human body were crouched there on its side—its knees pressed into its breast. For a moment Mr. Larkins stared at it. Did Roberts mean—could it be that this spot marked a grave? Mr. Larkins shuddered, and turned his face full into the sunlight.

In the house once more, Mr. Larkins began his search for the diary of the scientist. He looked thoroughly in every room; he even penetrated the dismal cellar. But he found nothing. Coming back to his study at last he considered opening the closed room, but the clipping before him did not argue favorably. It was then that he caught sight of the boarded-up fireplace. He hesitated only for a moment; then he began to tear the boards away.

He was not disappointed, though his find was meager. Almost covered with ashes, he found two charred pieces of paper, which were most certainly from Brent's diary. He carried them carefully over to his table and placed them side by side with the letter and clipping. But his disappointment rose, when he found that the writing was almost illegible, and the contents were most incoherent. The excerpts were dated a week apart. The first read, as well as Mr. Larkins could decipher the script:

May 10—I did it today—it was all I could do. Who would have thought it? One chance out of one hundred! What annoys me is that I have succeeded, and can not announce it to the world. . . . I buried him in the back. . . . I wonder if . . . neighbors will see? I shall never forget . . . his face . . . his air of unholy . . . of sinful glee—his first strugglings for . . . life . . . and the expression . . . face, such cosmic . . . ”

The remainder of the paper was burnt away. Mr. Larkins would have liked to have known what word followed "cosmic." He turned his attention to the second excerpt.

May 17—I know he is dead! It was with my own hands! And still he paces—one, two, three, four, and over again. And that hellish pounding. My God! Will he never stop? It is driving me mad, people on the street turn and give me curious stares.

If I had not locked his room? But surely I am safe here. . . . He can not come here. How could it be? It is to defy all

the laws that mankind has been brought up to revere—but have I not myself proved the folly of those very laws I now champion? . . . What am I writing? As if the atmosphere of this old house could harm me! It is all my imagination. But no, there he goes again; pounding and pacing . . . pacing! Seeking for substance for a new body for a new material entity. He will need three—three living bodies. . . . What have I done? His room must not be opened. It establishes a link—a contact with that thing out there—it will draw him closer and closer . . . and closer. God! that devilish, devilish pacing! Always! Always! Always! What if he should come out?

Mr. Larkins was startled, to say the least. His natural conservatism urged him to take these excerpts as proof of Brent's insanity; but something in him was inclined toward the opposite view. It was the second excerpt that seemed to awaken a long-dead memory in Mr. Larkins' mind. It was of something that drummed insistently through his consciousness. He could not recall the title of the work, but it seemed to him to be an old paper on certain forms of ancient, barbaric magic mingled with designated ritualistic rites of old Chinese ancestor-worshippers. It seemed to him that there had been certain notes, certain cryptic comments, that virtually underscored a sentence in the second excerpt of Brent's diary:

Seeking for substance for a new body—for a new material entity  
He will need three—three living bodies.

There was something of age-old gods of evil, genus older than those of the *Arabian Nights*, who inhabited the nethermost spaces of the cosmos. And there were paragraphs of weird, horrible rites—of materialization of these ancient demons—and certainly there was something of three living sacrifices, from whom all life was extracted, leaving them cold and stiffened as arctic stone.

Mr. Larkins was stunned by the immensity of his speculations. His mind was channeled—it led but to one thing. Could it be that the fingers of Mr. Brent's ghastly experiment had reached out much farther than intended? that the experiment had reached through space into the cosmos and touch upon . . . ? Mr. Larkins shook off the

impression, and slipped the excerpts together with the letter and clipping under the paperweight. Then he rose, donned his topcoat and stick, and went for an afternoon in Hyde Park

Somewhat delayed on the underground, Mr Larkins arrived at Number 21 shortly after dark had fallen. He had forgotten all about the matter of the closed room, and approached his work, eager to rescue the hero of *Island Gods* from the desert island.

He had moved his hero approximately twenty miles into midocean when the pacing began. Mr. Larkins stopped work at once; he cast a sidelong glance at his flash and revolver, still where he had put them two nights before. His conservatism urged him to investigate; again some opposing factor urged him to flee—to leave the house

But his conservatism won. Mr. Larkins took up his flashlight and revolver and crept cautiously up the stairs. Half way up, he stopped and listened. The disturbance was exactly the same as that of the night before. Then, tightening his grasp on his weapon, he went resolutely on.

It was only natural that he should stop a moment to listen before the door, before he took from his key ring the key to open the room. For an interval he heard nothing, then the slow, monotonous pacing sound again. He threw open the door and shot his flash around

There was nothing in the room—but the pacing continued! Suddenly, inexplicably, Mr. Larkins felt frightened. Had he but found some living thing—something to challenge! But this inexplicable nothingness—and that awful pacing!

Then abruptly his flashlight went out. For a moment Mr. Larkins was stunned. Then he noticed that the window at the end of the room looked directly down on the lilac bush, and above the bare spot hung a shadow, distinct in the glow of the street lamp—a shadow that was not of the lilac bush.

Mr Larkins watched as if fascinated. The shadow rose like a cloud, hung for a moment suspended in the air, then shot swiftly toward the window. Mr Larkins turned to flee, and at that instant he saw before him, limned against the window, an awful thing.

He ran headlong into the hall and down the stairs. As he fumbled

at the door of his library, he threw over his shoulder a quick, scared glance. Then the door opened, and he stumbled into the room. At once he slammed the door to, and stood with his back against it, breathing heavily. Leaning there, he listened. From upstairs came a sound as of some heavy lumbering object pacing—and almost immediately after, an ominous creak of hall boards. Suddenly the telephone on the table caught Mr. Larkins' eye—and close by, the letter from Roberts.

The letter from Roberts—in a flash the postscript

If you should want me, call Picadilly 49-A

He found himself at the instrument, frantically repeating a number to the operator. Then from over the wire, a voice "Roberts? Larkins? Listen, I've opened the closed room—and it's coming—down the stairs—a horrible thing—from that spot—the grave under the bush.—I can hear it coming—a great, awful thing. What ungodly creation is buried there?—It towers—ghoul like—but with a face—a human face that glows hellishly—a glow that lights its every contour. It is evil—cosmic evil—and cold as arctic stone. There are ancient gods. It is all clear now—your letter, the diary, Brent. It is still on the stairs—but it is coming—coming. There is something wrong. I can not move—as if I were chained. But I will shoot this thing!—It is in the hall now. The knob is turning—Oh! Christ!"

The telephone struck the table with a loud clatter; immediately after, a shot echoed through the house.

It was the shot that brought the 'bobby' who discovered the author's body. The 'bobby' says that the body was very cold and rigid, as if something vital had been drawn from it; yet he affirms that he entered the house immediately after the shot—this certainly cannot be true. He also asserts that there was someone else in the house, for he distinctly remembers a ghastly chill about his throat, a sudden draft—as if someone had opened a door somewhere—and a steady, low pacing sound creeping away into the distance.



# *The Lair of the Star-Spawn*

*(The extraordinary paper, now for the first time published below, was found among the private documents of the late Eric March, whose death followed so suddenly upon his return from that mysterious expedition into Burma, from which only he returned alive almost three decades ago.)*

If there ever be a reader to this, my first and only word on that matter which has robbed me of all hope of security in this world, I ask him only to read what I have written, and then, if he is incredulous, to go himself to that mountainous expanse of Burma, deep in its most secret places, and see there the wreck of the greenstone city in the center of the Lake of Dread on the long-lost Plateau of Sung. And if he is not yet satisfied, to go to the village of Bangka in the province of Shan-si, and ask for the philosopher and scientist, Doctor Fo Lan, once far famed among the scholars of the world and now lost to them of his own volition. Doctor Fo-Lan may tell what I will not. For I write in the hope of forgetting, I want to put away from me for all time the things that I chronicle in this document.

Well within the memory of my generation, the Hawks Expedition set out for the little explored secret fastnesses of Burma. In all the newspapers of the world was announced, not three months after the setting-out from New York, the tragic end of that expedition. In the files of any newspaper may be found the story of how the expedition was attacked by what were apparently bandits, and killed to the last man, mercilessly and brutally, the party looted, and the bodies left exposed to the hot, unwavering rays of the Burma sun. In most chroni-

cles, there were two additional details -the first telling of the discovery of the body of a native guide about a mile or more from the scene of the ghastly slaughter, and the second of the utter disappearance of Eric Marsh, student and assistant to Geoffrey Hawks, famed explorer and scholar, whose life was lost in the unfortunate Burmese expedition.

I am Eric Marsh. My return was chronicled almost a month later, less sensationally, for which I am grateful. Yet, while these papers state the manner in which I found my way once more into civilization, they laugh at me a little when they say I will not talk, and condole with me a little less when they say that my mind is no longer sound. Perhaps my mind has been affected; I can no longer judge.

It is with the events of that period between the murderous attack on the Hawks Expedition and my own return to the known world with which this document is concerned. Of the beginning, I need tell little. For the very curious, there are the easily obtained periodical accounts. Let me only say at the outset that our attackers were not bandits. On the contrary, they were a horde of little men, the tallest of them no more than four feet, with singularly small eyes set deep in dome like, hairless heads. These queer attackers fell upon the party and had killed men and animals with their bright swords almost before our men could extract their weapons.

My own escape occurred only through the merest chance. It had so happened that my superior, Hawks, had somehow lost his compass case, which he always carried at his side. We had been travelling no more than two hours that morning, and he knew that the case had been at his belt when we started. Some one had to go back, for the compasses were indispensable to us. We looked to one of the natives to return quickly along the trail, but to our surprise every native we had with us refused point-blank to return alone. A strange uneasiness had been current among them for all of the last day, ever since we had come within sight of the range of high hills where lay the so-called lost Plateau of Sung. It is true that strange legends had reached us even before we had left Ho-Nan province of a weird race of little people, to whom the natives applied the odd name, "Tcho-Tcho," supposedly living near or on the Plateau of Sung. Indeed, it had been our intention

to pry into these legends if possible, despite the reticence and obvious fear of the natives, who looked upon the lost plateau as a place of evil.

Annoyed at this delay, and yet desirous of pushing on, Hawks was not favorable toward the plan that we all return, and in the end I volunteered to cover the distance myself while the party went on more slowly until my return. I found the case of compasses without trouble lying in the center of our trail only five miles back, and veered my mount to rejoin the party. A mile away, I heard their screams, and the few shots they were enabled to fire. At the moment I was screened from view of the party by a low mound on which grew short bushes. I stopped the horse and dropped to the ground. I crawled slowly up the slope and looked across the flat land beyond to where the party was being massacred. Through my glasses I saw that the attackers outnumbered the party by at least four to one, that they had had a great advantage, for they had evidently attacked just as the party was stringing out to enter a defile at the base of the range of high hills beyond. I realized at once that I could do nothing to help. Consequently I remained hidden until the strange little men had vanished, then I rode cautiously forward to the scene of the carnage.

I found there only dead bodies, no living thing had been left behind. The cavalcade, I discovered at once, had been plundered, but fortunately for me, the marauders had taken neither food nor water, contenting themselves, curiously enough with our plans and implements. Thus I was without even a shovel with which I might have given my companions something like a burial.

There was nothing left for me to do but return to civilization, I could not go on alone. Consequently I took as many canteens of water and packers of food as I could carry on my horse, and started away.

I had one of two routes of return open to me: either I could go back the way we had come, and risk death on the long journey over uninhabited land, or I could forge ahead and cross the plateau and the high hills; for I knew that uninhabited land lay immediately beyond the range before me. The distance beyond the range was less than half that which I would have to recover, were I to retrace the party's course. Yet it was an unknown route, and there was danger of again encounter



ing the little people whose ruthlessness I had witnessed. The factor that finally decided me was the still flowering hope that I might by some accident stumble upon the ruins of the forgotten city of Alaozar, which century-old legends traced to the plateau before me. Accordingly, I went ahead.

I had not gone far, following as best I could the direction the compass indicated, when I heard a low call a little to my left. I pulled up my horse to listen. It came again, half call, half moan. Dismounting, I walked to the spot, and there I found the native whom the journals have mentioned as having made his way from the scene of the massacre. He was badly wounded in the abdomen by the same blades that had killed my companions, and he was obviously near death. I knelt beside him and raised his agonized body in my arms.

His eyes flashed recognition, and he stared up into my face as memory returned to him, and unutterable horror crossed his features. "Tcho-Tcho," he muttered. Little men—from Lake of Dread . . . walled city."

I felt his body go limp in my arms, and, looking into his face, I thought him dead. I took his wrist in my hand and felt no pulse. Laying him carefully on the ground, I started away from him. As I walked through the low underbrush, a call much weaker than the first caused me to turn abruptly. The native was still lying on the ground, but his head was slightly raised with what must have been a tremendous effort, and one arm pointed weakly in the direction of the hills ahead.

"Not there!" he rasped, "Not . . . to . . . hills." Then he fell back, shuddering, and lay still.

For a moment I was disconcerted, but I could not afford to ponder his warning. I went on, toiling all afternoon up that ever steepening slope before me, through almost impassable defiles and up sheer walls. Occasional trees, low, stunted growths, grew from the brush and wasteland, but these impeded my progress not at all.

When I reached the crest of the range, the sun was setting. Looking into the red blaze that tinted the desolate expanse before me, the monotonous, uninhabited waste of unknown Burma, my mind reverted to the fate of my companions and my own plight. Grief mingled with



fear of the oncoming night. But suddenly I started. Was it the sun in my eyes that created the strange sight which grew out of the wasteland far ahead on the Plateau of Sung? But as I continued to stare ahead, the moving red before my eyes dimmed away, and I knew that what I saw existed, was no illusion, no fantasm. Far away across the plateau on whose very edge I stood rose a grove of tall trees, and beyond the trees, yet set in their midst, I saw the walls and parapets of a city, red in the glare of the dying sun, rising alone in the plateau like a single monument in a burial ground. I hardly dared believe what my mind thrust forward, yet there was no alternative. Before me lay the long-lost city of Alaozar, the shunned dead city which for centuries had figured in the tales and legends of frightened natives!

Whether the city stood on an island and was surrounded by water—the Lake of Dread—as natives also believed, I could not tell, for it was at least five miles away, at a spot which I estimated should be the center of the Plateau of Sung. In the morning I would venture there, and go alone into the city deserted for centuries by men. The sun threw its last long rays over the waste expanse even as I looked toward the fabled city of Burma, and the shadows of dusk crept upon the plateau. The city faded from sight.

I hobbled my horse in a near-by spot where a reddish brown grass grew, gave it as much of the water as I could spare, and prepared for the night. I did not sit long in the glow of my fire, for I was tired after my long climb, and sleep would wipe away or make less real the memory of my dead friends and the haunting fear of danger. But when I lay down under the star-filled sky, I fell asleep not amid dreams of those dead, but of others—those who had gone from Alaozar, the shunned and unknown.

How long I slept I can not say. I awoke suddenly, almost at once alert, feeling that I was no longer alone. My horse was whinnying uncannily. Then, as my eyes became accustomed to the star-swept darkness, I saw something that brought all my senses to focus. Far ahead of me against the sky I saw a faint white line, flame-like, wavering up, up into the sky toward the distant stars. It was like a living thing, like an electrical discharge, surging always upward. And it came from

somewhere on the plateau before me. Abruptly, I sat up. The white line came from the earth far ahead of me, in the spot where I had seen the city in the trees, or close beside it.

Then, as I looked, something happened to distract my attention from the light. A moving shadow crossed my vision and for an instant blotted out the wavering line ahead. At the same moment my horse neighed suddenly, wildly, and shied away, tearing at the rope which held him. There was some one close to me—man or animal, I could not tell.

Even as I started to rise to my feet something struck me a crushing blow on the back of my head. The last thing I knew was a faint, far away knowledge that around me there was suddenly the sound of many little feet pattering, pressing close to me. Then I sank into blackness.

I awoke in a bed.

When last I had lain down to sleep on the Plateau of Sung, I know I had been over a day's journey from even the roughest native mats; yet I awoke in a bed, and intuitively I knew that only a comparatively short time had passed since the mysterious attack made on me.

For some moments I lay perfectly still, not knowing what danger might lurk near me. Then I essayed to move about. There was still a sharp pain in my head. I put up my hand to feel the wound I felt sure must be there—and encountered a bandage! My exploring fingers told me that it was not only a skilful bandage but also a thoroughly done job. Yet I could not have been taken out of the secret fastnesses of Burma in such a short time, could not have been moved to civilization!

But my ruminations were cut short, for abruptly a door opened into the room, and a light entered. I say a light entered, for that is exactly the impression I got. It was an ordinary lamp, and it seemed to float along without human guidance. But as it came closer, I saw that it was held aloft by a very little man, certainly of that same company which had only so recently slain the men and animals of the Hawks Expedition! The creature advanced solemnly and put the lamp, which gave off a weird green light, on a stone table near the bed in which I lay. Then I saw something else.

In my amazement, I had failed to notice the man who walked behind

the creature carrying the lamp. Now, when the little man bowed suddenly in his direction, and scurried away, closing the door of the room behind him, I saw what in proportion to my first visitor seemed a giant, yet the man was in reality only slightly over six feet in height.

He stood at the side of my bed, looking down at me in the glow of the green lamp. He was a Chinaman, already well past middle age. His green-white face seemed to leap out from the black of his gown, and his white hands with their long, delicate fingers seemed to hang in black space. On his head he wore a black skull-cap, from beneath the rim of which projected a few straggling white hairs.

For a few moments he stood looking down at me in silence. Then he spoke and to my astonishment, addressed me in flawless English.

"How do you feel now, Eric Marsh?"

The voice was soft, sibilant, pleasant. The man, I felt, was a doctor, I looked at him more intently, seeking to draw him closer. There was something alarmingly familiar about his face.

"I feel better," I said. "There is still slight pain." The man offered no comment, and I went on, after a brief pause. "Can you tell me where I am? How you know my name?"

My strange visitor closed his eyes reflectively for a moment; then again came his soft voice. "Your baggage is here; it identifies you." He paused. Then he said, "As to where you are, perhaps if I told you, you would not know. You are in the city of Alaozar on the Plateau of Sung."

Yes, that was the explanation. I was in the lost city, and it was not deserted. Perhaps I should have guessed that the strange little people had come from this silent city. I said, "I know." Abruptly, as I looked at the impassive face above me, a memory returned. "Doctor," I said, "you remind me of a certain dead man."

His eyes gazed kindly at me; then he looked away, closing his eyes dreamily. "I had not hoped that any one might remember," he murmured. "Yet . . . of whom do I remind you, Eric Marsh?"

"Of Doctor Fo-Lan, who was murdered at his home in Peiping a few years ago."

He nodded almost imperceptibly. "Doctor Fo-Lan was not murdered,



Eric Marsh. His brother was left there in his stead, but he was kidnapped and taken from the world. I am Doctor Fo-Lan."

"These little people," I murmured "They took you?" I thought for a fleeting instant of his standing among them. "Then you are not their leader!"

The suggestion of a smile haunted Fo-Lan's lips. "Leader," he repeated. "No, I am their servant. I serve the Tcho-Tcho people in one of the most diabolic schemes ever formulated on the face of the earth!"

The astonished questions that came to my lips were abruptly quieted by the silent opening of the door, and the entrance of two of the Tcho-Tcho people. At the same moment, Doctor Fo-Lan said, as if nothing had happened, "You will rest until tonight. Then we will walk about Alaozar; this has been arranged for you."

One of the little people spoke crisply in a language I did not understand; I did however, catch the name "Fo-Lan." The doctor turned without a further word and left the room, and the two Tcho-Tcho people followed him.

Presently the door opened once more, and food and drink were brought me. From that time until Fo Lan returned at dusk, I was not interrupted again.

The short walk in the streets of Alaozar which followed fascinated me. Fo Lan led me first to his apartments, which were not far from the room in which I had spent the day, and there allowed me to look out over the city to the plateau beyond. I saw at once that the walled city was indeed on an island in the midst of a lake, the surface of which was covered by heavy moving mists, present, I was informed, all day long despite the burning sun. The water, where it could be seen, was green-black, the same strange color of the ancient masonry that made up the city of Alaozar.

Fo-Lan at my side said, "Not without base do ancient legends of China speak of the long-lost city on the Isle of the Stars in the Lake of Dread."

"Why do they call it the Isle of the Stars?" I asked, looking curiously at Fo-Lan.

The doctor's expression was inscrutable. He hesitated before answer-



ing, but finally spoke. "Because long before the time of man, strange beings from the stars—from Rigel, Betelgeuze—the stars in Orion, lived here. And some of them *live here yet!*"

I was nonplussed at the intensity of his voice, and then I did not understand, did not dream of his meaning. "What do you mean?" I asked.

He made a vague gesture with his hands, and with his eyes bade me be cautious. "You were saved from death only so that you might help me," Fo-Lan said. "And I, Eric Marsh, have for years been helping these little people, directing them to penetrate the deep and unknown caverns beneath the Lake of Dread and the surrounding Plateau of Sung where Llogor and Zhar, ancient evil ones, and their minions await the day when they can once more sweep over the earth to bring death and destruction and incredible age-old evil!"

I shuddered, and despite its monstrous and unbelievable implications, I felt truth in Fo-Lan's amazing statement. Yet I said, "You do not speak like a scientist, Doctor."

He gave a curt, brittle laugh. "No," he replied, "not as you understand a scientist. But what I knew before I came to this place is small in comparison to what I learned here. And the science that men in the outer world know even now is nothing but a child's mental play. Hasn't it sometimes occurred to you that after all we may be the playthings of intelligences so vast that we are unable to conceive them?"

Fo-Lan made a slight gesture of annoyance and silenced the protest on my lips with a sign. Then we began the descent into the streets. Only when I was outside, standing in the narrow streets scarcely wide enough for four men walking abreast, did I realize that Fo-Lan's apartment was in the highest tower in Aloazar. The city was very small by comparison. There were few high buildings, most of them crouching low on the ground. The city took up most of the island, save for a very inconsiderable fringe of land just beyond the ancient walls, on which grew the trees I had seen at sunset the day before, trees which I now noticed were different from any others I had ever seen, having a strange reddish-green foliage and green-black trunks. The sibilant whispering of their curious leaves accompanied us in our short walk, and it was

not until we were once more in Fo-Lan's apartment that I remembered there had been no wind of any kind; yet the leaves had moved continually! Then, too, I had remarked upon the scarcity of the Tcho-Tcho people.

"There are not many of them," Fo-Lan said, "but they are powerful in their own way. Yet there are curious lapses in their intelligence. Yesterday, for instance, after spying your party from the top of this tower, and after going out and annihilating it, they returned with two of their number dead; they had been shot. The Tcho-Tcho people could not believe them dead, since it is impossible for them to conceive of such a weapon as a gun. At base, they are very simple people; yet they are inherently malevolent, for they know that they are working for the destruction of all that is good in the world."

"I do not quite understand," I said.

"I can feel that you do not believe in this monstrous fable," Fo-Lan replied. "How can I explain it to you? You are bound by conventions long established. Yet I will try. Perhaps you wish to think that it is all a legend, but I will offer you tangible proof that there is more than legend here.

"Eons ago, a strange race of elder beings lived on Earth; they came from Rigel and Betelgeuze to take up their abode here and upon other planets. But they were followed by those who had been their slaves on the stars, those who had set up opposition to Elder Ones—the evil followers of Cthulhu, Hastur the Unspeakable, Lloigor and Zhar, the twin Obscenities, and others. The Great Old Ones fought these evil beings for possession of the earth, and after many centuries, they conquered. Hastur was exiled to Hali in the Hyades, Cthulhu was banished to the lost sea kingdom of R'lyeh, while Lloigor and Zhar were buried alive deep in the inner fastnesses of Asia—beneath the accursed Plateau of Sung!

"Then the Old Ones, the Elder Gods, returned to the stars of Orion, leaving behind them ever-damned Cthulhu, Lloigor, Zhar, and others. But the evil ones left seeds on the plateau, on the island in the Lake of Dread which the Old Ones caused to be put there. And from these seeds have sprung the Tcho-Tcho people, the spawn of elder evil, and

now these people await the day when Lloigor and Zhar will rise again and sweep over all the earth!"

I had to summon all my restraint to keep from shrieking my disbelief aloud. After some hesitation I forced myself to say in as calm a voice as I could assume, "What you have told me is impossible, Fo-lan."

Fo-lan smiled wearily. He moved closer to me, put his hand gently on my arm, and said, "Have they never taught you, Eric Marsh, that there lives no man who may say what is possible and what is not? What I have told you is true, it is impossible only because you are incapable of thinking of this earth in any terms but those suggested by the little science the outer world knows."

I felt myself rebuked. "And I must help you raise these dead things, penetrate the subterranean caverns below Alaozar and bring up the creatures that lie there to destroy the earth?" I asked incredulously.

Fo-Lan looked at me impassively. Then his voice sank to a whisper, and he said, "Yes . . . and no. The Tcho Tcho people believe you will help me to raise them, and so they must continue to believe, but you and I, Eric Marsh . . . you and I are going to destroy the things below!"

I was bewildered. For a moment I entertained the idea that my companion was mad. "Two of us—against a host of creatures and the Tcho-Tcho people—and our only weapon my gun, wherever that is?"

Fo Lan shook his head. "You anticipate me. You and I will be but the instruments, through us the things below will die."

"You are speaking in riddles, Doctor," I said.

"Nightly for many months I have tried to call for help with the force of my mind, have tried to get through the cosmos to those who alone can help in the titanic struggle before us. Last night I found a way, and soon I myself will go forth and demand the assistance we need."

"Still I do not understand," I said.

Fo-Lan closed his eyes for a moment. Then he said, "You do not want to understand me, or you are afraid to. I am suggesting that by telepathy I will summon help from those who first fought the things imprisoned below us."

"There exists no proof of telepathy, Doctor."



It was a foolish thing to say, as Fo-Lan immediately pointed out to me. He smiled, a little scornfully. "Try to throw off your shackles, Eric Marsh. You come to a place you did not know existed, and you see things which are to you impossible; yet you seek to deny something so close and conceivable as telepathy."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm afraid I'm not going to be much of a help to you. How am I to help you? And how will you go forth?"

"You are to watch over my body when I travel upward to seek the help of those above."

Dimly, intelligence began to come to me. "Last night," I murmured, "out there on the plateau, I saw a white line wavering into the sky."

Fo-Lan nodded. "That was the way," he said, "made visible by the power of my desire. Soon I shall travel it."

I leaned forward eagerly, wanting to ask him a score of questions. But Fo-Lan held up his hand for silence. "Have you heard nothing, Eric Marsh?" he said. "All this while it has been growing."

The moment Fo-Lan mentioned it, I realized that I had heard something, had been hearing it ever since we had reentered the doctor's apartment. It was a low humming, a disturbing sound as of a chant, which seemed to well up from far below, and yet seemed equally present from all sides. And at the same time I was conscious of a distinct atmospheric change, something which Fo-Lan did not perhaps notice, since he had been here now for years. It was a growing tension, a pressing, feverish tension in the chill night air. Slowly there grew in me a feeling of great fear; the very air, I felt, was noxious with cosmic evil.

"What is it?" I murmured.

Fo-Lan did not answer. He appeared to be listening intently to the chant or humming sound mounting from below, smiling to himself. Then he looked cryptically at me and abruptly stepped to the outer wall. There he pulled hard at one of the ancient stones in the wall, and in a moment, a large section of the wall swung slowly inward, revealing a dark passage beyond, a secret way leading downward. Fo-Lan came swiftly back toward me, taking up one of the little green lamps with which I had once before come in contact, and lighting it as he spoke to me.



I have not been idle in these past years. I fashioned that way myself, and only I know of it. Come, Eric Marsh, I will show you what no Tcho-Tcho suspects I have ever seen, what will silence all protest or disbelief in you."

The stairs which I found myself descending in a few moments led downward along the round wall of a shaft that pierced the earth. Down, down we went, feeling the walls on both sides of us with our hands. Fo-Lan carried the lamp in one hand, and its greenish glow served as illumination for our perilous journey, for the steps were uneven and steep. As we descended, the sound from below grew noticeably louder. Now the humming sound was frequently cut into by another, the sound of many voices murmuring together in some long forgotten language.

Then, abruptly, Fo Lan stopped. He gave the lamp to me, and with a brief caution to me not to speak, gave his attention to the wall before him. Raising the lamp above my head, I saw that the stone steps went no farther, that we were, in fact, within two feet of solid masonry. Suddenly Fo Lan reached back and extinguished the light, and at the same time I was conscious of an opening in the wall before us, where Fo-Lan had moved aside an old stone. "Look down, and with care," he whispered. Then he stepped aside, and I peered downward.

I looked into a gigantic cavern, illuminated by a huge green lamp seemingly suspended in space, and by at least a hundred smaller ones. The first thing that caught my eye was the horde of Tcho Tcho people prostrate on the floor, it was from them that the low murmuring sound was coming. Then I saw an upright figure among them. It was that of a Tcho-Tcho man, slightly taller than the others, I thought, disfigured by a hump on his back, and incredibly old. He was stalking slowly forward, supported by a crooked black stick. Behind me, Fo Lan, noticing the direction of my glance, murmured, "That is E-poh, leader of the Tcho-Tcho people; he is seven thousand years old!" I could not help turning in utter surprise. Fo-Lan motioned forward. "You have seen nothing. Look beyond them, beyond E poh, in the half-darkness forward, but do not cry out."

My gaze swept those prostrate figures, passed beyond E-poh, and began to explore the dusk beyond. I think I must have been looking for

some moments at the thing that crouched there before I actually realized it; that was because the creature was so large. I hesitate to write of it, for I can blame no one for not believing me. Yet it was there. I saw it first because my gaze fixed upon the green gleaming from its eyes. Then, abruptly, I saw it entirely. I thank Providence that the light was not strong, that only its vaguest outlines were clear to me, and I regret only that my innate doubt of Fo-Lan's strange story made the shock of this revelation accordingly sharper.

For the thing that crouched in the weird green dusk was a living mass of shuddering horror, a ghastly mountain of sensate, quivering flesh, whose tentacles, far-flung in the dim reaches of the subterranean cavern, emitted a strange humming sound, while from the depths of the creature's body came a weird and horrific ululation. Then I fell back into Fo-Lan's arms. My mouth opened to cry out, but I felt the doctor's firm hand clapped across my lips, and from a great distance I seemed to hear his voice. "*That is Lloigor!*"

Fo-Lan's story was true!

I found myself finally in Fo-Lan's apartment. I know I must have climbed the long winding steps, but I do not remember climbing them, for the tumultuous thoughts that troubled me and the hideous memory of the thing I had seen served to drive from my mind all consciousness of what I was doing.

Fo-Lan came quickly away from the wall and stood before me, his face triumphant in the green lamplight. "For three years I have helped them penetrate into the earth, into the caverns below, have helped them in their evil purpose; now I shall destroy, and my dead brother will be avenged!" He spoke with an intensity I had not imagined him capable of.

He did not wait for any comment from me. Passing beyond me, he put the lamp down on a small table near the door. Then he went into the bedroom and lit another lamp; I saw its green light on the wall as he came once more into the room where I stood.

"Mind," said Fo-Lan as he stood before me, "is all-powerful. Mind is everything, Eric Marsh. This evening you saw things of which you hesitated to speak, even before you saw the thing in the cavern below—

Lloigor You saw leaves move on trees—and they moved by the power of evil intelligences far below them, deep in the earth—a living proof of the existence of Lloigor and Zhar.

"E-poh has a mind of great power, but the knowledge I have endows me with greater power despite his tremendous age. Long hours I have sought to penetrate cosmic space, and so powerful has my mind become that even you could see the thought-thread that wavered upward from Alaozar last night." And mind, Eric Marsh, exists independent of body.

I will wait no longer. Tonight I will go forth, now, while the worship is in progress. And you must watch my body."

Colossal as his plan was, I could only believe. What I had seen during the short space of my visit was unbelievable, impossible, yet *real*.

Fo-Lan continued. "My body will rest on the bed in the chamber beyond, but my mind will go where I wish it with a speed incomparable to anything we know. I will think myself on Rigel, and I shall be there. You must watch that none disturbs my body while I am gone. It will not be long."

Fo-Lan drew from his voluminous robe a small pistol, which I recognized immediately as one I had been carrying in my pack. "You will kill any one who tries to enter, Eric Marsh."

Beckoning me to follow him, Fo-Lan led the way into his chamber, and despite my feeble protest, stretched himself on the bed. Almost at once his body went rigid, and at the same moment I saw a gray outline of Fo-Lan standing before me, a smile on his thin lips, his eyes turned upward. Then he was gone, and I was alone with his body.

For over an hour I sat in Fo-Lan's apartment, my terror mounting with each second. Only in that hour was I capable of approaching in my thoughts the cataclysmic horror which confronted the world if Fo-Lan were unsuccessful in his daring request. Once, too, while I sat there, pattering footsteps halted beyond the outer door; then, to my unspeakable relief, passed on. Toward the end of my watch the abrupt cessation of the chanting sounds from below, followed by the noises of movement throughout the island city, indicated that the worship



was over. Then for the first time I left the chamber to take up my position at the outer door, where I stood, gun in hand, waiting for the interruptions my terrified mind told me must come.

But I never had cause to use the weapon, for suddenly I heard the sound of feet behind me. I whirled and saw Fo-Lan! He had returned. He stood quietly, listening, then he nodded to himself and said, "We must leave Alaozar, Eric Marsh. Alone, we can not do it, and we have little time to waste. We must see E-poh, and have his permission to go beyond to the Plateau of Sung."

Fo-Lan moved forward now, and tugged at a long rope which hung quite near me along the wall. From somewhat far below there came the abrupt clang of a gong. Once more Fo-Lan pulled the rope, and again the gong sounded.

"That is to inform E-poh that I must speak to him about an urgent matter—concerning the things below."

"And your quest?" I asked. "Has it been successful?"

He smiled wryly. "It will be successful only if I can convince E-poh to open the way for Lloigor and Zhar and their countless hordes to night—now! The way must be open, otherwise even the Star-Warriors are helpless to penetrate earth."

The sound of running feet in the corridor cut short my questions. The door opened inward and on the threshold I saw two of the Tcho-Tcho people, dressed in long green robes and wearing on their foreheads curious five-pointed star designs. They ignored me completely, addressing themselves to Fo-Lan. A rapid conversation in their strange language followed, and in a moment the two little people turned to lead the way.

Fo-Lan started after them, motioning me to follow. "From E-poh," he whispered. Then he added in a quick voice, "Be careful and speak no English before E-poh, for he understands it. Also, be certain you still have the gun, for E-poh will not let us go beyond Alaozar without an escort. And those little people you and I will have to kill."

We went rapidly down the corridor, and after a long descent, found ourselves on the street level, and deep in the tower. At last we entered an apartment similar in many respects to Fo-Lan's, but neither so small



nor so civilized in its aspect. There we confronted E-poh, surrounded by a group of little people dressed similarly to our guides. Fo-Lan bowed low, and I did the same under the stress of those curious little eyes turned on me.

E-poh was seated on a sort of raised dais, suggestive of his leadership, but beyond the evidence of his great age in his lined face and his withered hands, and the servile attitude of the Tcho-Tcho people near him, there was no indication that he was the ruler of the little people around us.

'E-poh,' said Fo-Lan, speaking in English for my benefit, "I have had intelligence from those below."

E-poh closed his eyes slowly, saying in a strange whistling voice, "And this intelligence—what is it, Fo-Lan?"

Fo-Lan chose to ignore his question, "Lloigor and Zhar themselves have spoken to my mind!" he said.

E-poh opened his eyes and looked at the doctor in disbelief. "Even to me Zhar has never spoken, Fo-Lan. How can it be that he has spoken to you?"

"Because I have fashioned the way, mine have been the hands that groped below and found Lloigor and those others. Zhar is greater than Lloigor, and of greater age, and his word is law to those below."

"And what has Zhar communicated to you, Fo-Lan?"

"It is written below that tonight is the time when the buried ones wish to come forth, and it is decreed that the servants of E-poh must go beyond Alaozar, beyond the Lake of Dread to the Plateau of Sung, there to await the coming of the Old Ones from below."

E-poh peered intently at Fo-Lan, his perplexity evident. "Tonight I spoke long with Lloigor; it is strange that he told me nothing of this plan, Fo-Lan."

Fo-Lan bowed again. "That is because the decision is Zhar's, and of this Lloigor did not know until now."

"And it is strange that the Old Ones did not address themselves to me."

For a moment Fo-Lan hesitated, then he said, "That is because Zhar wishes me to go beyond Alaozar, to address those below Sung, while

E-poh and his people must summon the Gods below from the towers and house-tops of Alaozar. When Lloigor and Zhar have come above the Lake of Dread, then Eric Marsh and I must return to Alaozar, to plan for them the way beyond, into the outer world."

E-poh pondered this statement. In me uneasiness was beginning to grow when at last the Tcho-Tcho leader said, "It will be as you wish, Fo Lan, but four of my people must go with you and the American."

Fo Lan bowed. "It is pleasing to me that four others accompany us. But it is necessary also for us to take with us food and water, for there is no way of telling how many hours it may take the Old Ones to rise from below."

E-poh acquiesced without question.

Within a half-hour the six of us found ourselves pushing off the Isle of the Stars into the Lake of Dread, heavily shrouded in thick mists which gave off a strange putrescent odor. The barge-like boat in which we rode was strangely suggestive of ancient Roman galleys, yet very different. The Tcho-Tcho people sculled their way across the lake, and in a few moments we had reached the opposite shore and were pushing rapidly across the Plateau of Sung.

We had not gone far, when from behind us came a weird whistling call, then another and another, and finally a ghastly assembly was piping weirdly from the towers of Alaozar. And from below there came suddenly the terrifying sound of movements under the earth.

"They have opened the vast caverns below the city," murmured Fo Lan, "and they are calling forth Lloigor and Zhar and those below them."

Then Fo-Lan looked swiftly around, calculating the distance we had covered. Abruptly he turned to me, whispering, "Give me the gun; they will not hear in the city."

Silently I handed the doctor the weapon, and following his sign, backed away. Sharply the sound of the first shot cut into the night; immediately after, a second shot rang out. Two of our little companions were dead. But the other two seeing what had happened to their companions, and sensing their own fate, jumped numbly away, drawing their sharp little two-edged swords. Then, together, they came at

Fo-Lan The revolver spat again, and one of them went down, clawing wildly at the air. But the last of them came on—and the revolver jammed.

Fo-Lan leaped aside at the same instant that I flung myself forward, falling on the Tcho-Tcho man from behind. The force of my attack caused him to drop the weapon he held in his hand, and I thought for a moment that his death was certain. But I had reckoned without his strength. He whirled at once, catching me unawares, and with the greatest ease flung me five feet from him. But this short pause had been sufficient for Fo-Lan; darting forward, he seized the weapon the Tcho-Tcho man had dropped. Then, just as the little man turned, Fo-Lan plunged the weapon into his body. He dropped instantly.

I staggered to my feet, bruised from the shock of being thrown to the ground with such force; I had not imagined that these little men could be so powerful, despite Fo-Lan's early warning. Fo-Lan was standing quite still, and almost ecstatic smile on his face. I looked at him, and opened my lips to speak—and then a movement far behind him caught my eye. At the same instant Fo-Lan turned.

Far up in the sky a brilliant beam of light was growing—and it did not come from the earth! Then suddenly, so swiftly the light grew, the surrounding country was as light as day, and in the sky I saw countless hordes of strange, fiery creatures, apparently mounted on creatures of burden. The riders in the sky were oddly like men in construction, save that from their sides grew three pairs of flailing growths similar to arms, yet not arms and in these growths they carried curious tube-like weapons. And in size, these beings were monstrous.

'My God!' I exclaimed, when I could find my voice. 'What is it, Fo-Lan?'

Fo-Lan's eyes were gleaming in triumph. "They are the Star-Warriors sent by the Ancient Ones from Orion. Up there they listened to my plea, for they know that only the ancient weapons of the Elder Gods can punish and destroy."

I looked once more into the sky. The glowing beings were now much closer, and I saw that the things they rode were limbless—that they were exactly like long tubes, pointed at both ends, travelling evi-



dently only in the power of the ray of light emanating from the stars far above.

"The ululations from beneath the earth have guided them here — and now they will destroy!"

Fo-Lan's voice was drowned out abruptly by the terrific clamor that rose from Alaozar. For the Star-Warriors had surrounded the city, and now from their tube-like appendages shot forth great beams of annihilation and death! And the age old masonry of Alaozar was crumbling into ruin. Then suddenly the Star-Warriors descended, entering into the city, and penetrating the vast caverns beneath.

And then two things happened. The entire sky began to glow with a weird purple light, and in the ray that descended from above I saw a file of beings even stranger than the Star-Warriors. They were great, writhing pillars of light, moving like tremendous flames, colored purple and white, dazzling in their intensity. These gigantic beings from outer space descended swiftly, circling the Plateau of Sung, and from them great rays of stabbing light shot out toward the hidden fastnesses below. And at the same time, the earth began to tremble.

Shuddering, I put out my hand to touch Fo-Lan's arm. He was utterly unmoved, save in triumphant joy at the spectacle of the destruction of Alaozar. "The Great Old Ones themselves have come!" he cried out.

I remember wanting to say something, but I saw suddenly one of these inconceivable pillars of light bending over Fo-Lan and me, and I felt slithering tentacles gently reaching around me; then I knew no more.

There is little more to write. I came to my senses near Bangka, miles from the Plateau of Sung, and at my side was Fo-Lan, unhurt and smiling. We had been transported within the second by the Ancient God who had bent to save us from the destruction of the things beneath the earth.

The statement of Eric Marsh ends thus abruptly. However, what surmises might be made from it, this paper will not state. Mr. Marsh had appended to his curious statement several newspaper clippings, all of them dated within ten days of his appearance at Bangka, where he



evidently stayed with Doctor Fo-Lan before returning to America. There is room for only a brief summary of the clippings.

The first was from a Tokyo paper announcing the strange reappearance of Doctor Fo Lan. Another clipping from the same issue of that paper tells of a curious electrical display witnessed from several observatories in the Orient, seemingly centered in its elemental force somewhere in Burma. Still another paragraph concerns an apparition (thus it is called) supposedly seen in the night during which Doctor Fo-Lan and Eric Marsh so mysteriously returned to Bangka; it was that of a gigantic pillar of light, towering far into the sky, and alive with movement; it was seen by forty seven persons in and around Bangka.

The final clipping was dated ten days later; it was taken from an eminent London paper, and is the verbatim report of an aviator who flew over Burma in the endeavor to trace the source of a fetid odor which was sweeping the country, nauseating India and China for hundreds of miles around. The heart of this report is briefly:

*"The odor I traced to the so-called Plateau of Sung, to which I was attracted by accidental sight of hitherto unknown ruins in the heart of the plateau. I found, to my amazement, that for some reason the earth of the plateau had been broken and torn up for its entire area, save for one spot not far from a deep cavern near the ruins, which bears evidence of once having been a lake. On this spot I managed to effect a landing. I left the machine in order to determine the meaning of the great green-black masses of rotting flesh which greeted my eyes at once. But the odor forced a quick retreat. Yet this I know: the remains on the Plateau of Sung are those of what must have been gigantic animals, apparently boneless, and utterly unknown to man. And they must have met death in battle with mortal enemies!"*

## *Colonel Markesan*

I hesitated to ring the bell.

Since that time I have thought many times how much better it would have been if I had not rung it, if I had gone away from that large lonely old house in the pine grove.

But I rang, and abruptly the door swung back.

Far back in the shadows of a darkened hall stood a tall, elderly man, dressed in a greenish black suit. The deep shadow flung across the doorway by the close-pressing trees and the darker blackness of the unlighted hall served to leave his outlines faint. He stood touching the door with an outstretched arm, and his strange, lustrous eyes were fixed upon me with disconcerting intensity.

"Can you direct me to Colonel Markesan's estate?" I asked.

"I am Colonel Markesan," said the man in the hall, speaking in a soft, pleasant voice.

"I've come in answer to your advertisement for a caretaker," I said.

"Come in," said Colonel Markesan.

I stepped into the house, and the colonel began to walk down the hall, leaving me to close the door. "Follow me, please," he murmured, and led the way from the shadowy corridor into a library which was as dark and gloomy as the hall. A strong odor of long-settled dust and long-undisturbed wood and cloth hung in the air.

"Sit down, please," said the colonel. He himself sat down as he spoke.

The room was so dark that I could see no more than the vague outlines of his head projecting over the chair, and the strange whiteness of his face and hands in the gloom.

"Your name?" asked Colonel Markesan.

"Frederick Bancroft."

"Age?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Any chronic ill health? Or nervousness?"

"No."

"Any experience?"

"None. I've been a school teacher."

A momentary flicker of interest crossed the colonel's face. He looked quickly away from me and for a moment said nothing. Presently he faced me again and asked, "Have you any one depending on you?"

"No one but myself," I replied.

"Very good," said Colonel Markesan. "I need a strong young man to keep the estate in good shape; it has gone somewhat to seed in my absence, and I haven't the strength to keep it up. It must be perfectly clear, however, that I shall not care to be asked questions regarding the estate or any of my activities. I am prepared to pay well."

"What are the requirements?" I asked.

Colonel Markesan continued. "I have an aversion for society; you are to be my sole link with the world, for I seldom go out. You will begin your duties today by going into Boston to pay for the advertisement which brought you. Since I own no machine and my carriage lacks horses to draw it, you will have to walk. Fortunately, it isn't far. You will also attend to any other possible applicants by sending them away at once.

"By day you are to take care of the house and grounds. You will find everything you need in the shed beyond the house. I don't care to have you venture out at night, you must either stay in your room from dusk to dawn, or leave the house entirely for the night. In such case, you must leave at once after dinner, which you will eat alone and prepare for yourself, since I employ no other person, and you must not return until after sunrise."

Colonel Markesan paused, as if awaiting protest from me. I made none. His requirements, which impressed me as those of a confirmed misanthrope, were not particularly difficult.

Since I said nothing, he went on "If my requirements seem odd, you must overlook that. If you can't, you may as well leave as once."

"Your requirements do seem somewhat strange," I replied, "but I see no reason for not complying with them."

Colonel Markesan nodded and rose. He walked noiselessly to a cabinet lost in the shadows save for a thin greenish light which penetrated the shutters of a near-by window and faintly outlined the surface of the old cabinet. This the colonel opened, and from it he took a packet of bills which he gave to me saying, "I think that will pay at least a month's expenses."

After I had taken the money, he added, "That concludes the immediate business between us. Pray do not disturb me with any problems confronting you in the course of your duties, solve them as you please, as long as you don't infringe upon my fundamental rules."

With this final instruction, Colonel Markesan turned on his heel and glided over the soft carpet to the almost hidden door of an adjoining room, through which he vanished into the blackness beyond.

I hesitated for a moment; then I made my way to a window, opened it, and pushed back the shutter. The sunlight fell on an old-fashioned red rug into which a large flower pattern had been woven, and the details of the room were brought to sudden, dusty life—a few very stiff, obviously antique chairs, a handsome table, the cabinet, and shelves lining the walls upon which books were evenly and neatly arranged, and obviously not much in use. The entire room showed little sign of usage, for it was devoid of any token of life. I looked at last at the packet of money in my hands and was faintly amused to find that the bills were still the old large kind which had gone out of circulation some years before. A later examination showed that not one of them had been printed later than 1907.

Shortly after, I left the house and caught a ride into Boston.

On my return to the Markesan estate, I put my bags down outside the front door and made my way around the house to the small wooden shed deep in the foliage of tall bushes where my gardening equipment was stored. The tools were apparently very old, and were rusted, though still usable. When I left the shed presently, I observed that the estate



must run back a good distance, for as far as I could see through the woodland, no fence line broke the expanse. The vastness of the estate and its comparative silence brought a depressing feeling of loneliness which even the raucous cawing of a few crows in the pine trees could not dispel.

As I went down the hall with my bags I observed that a light was burning in the library, for the doorway of that room was limned in a strange, green glow, and shadows were flickering across the black rug in the hall. I deposited my bags at the foot of the staircase and entered the library, where I saw a solitary green candle alight on the table. Beneath the candle was a note, held down by a small bunch of keys.

The note was short:

"Mr. Bancroft: I have been called away, and am not sure when I will return. Your room is at the head of the stairs. There you may do as you please. Molest nothing in the remaining rooms, excepting the kitchen. Avoid opening windows, please. Here are the keys of the house, also. Go to work on the grounds when you wish.

"Colonel Markesan."

My room was bright and comfortable and in obvious readiness for a tenant. Though a bathroom adjoined, the room lacked all electric fixtures. The single window of the room was set deep in the wall and protected by iron bars set recently from the outside. This discovery disconcerted me somewhat, and my trepidation was considerably increased when I discovered on leaving the room that my door was fitted with a bolt on the outside, making it possible for my employer to lock me in at his wish. Apparently Colonel Markesan was determined that I should have no chance to disregard his order and leave my room after once retiring in the evening.

When I had unpacked my bags, I went in search of the kitchen. I discovered that every cupboard and shelf was empty, a discovery which made necessary another immediate trip into Cambridge, where I purchased supplies for several days.

It was lunchtime when I returned, and I prepared my first meal. The colonel's promise that I would eat alone was borne out, for no one

appeared then or during the remainder of that day, most of which I spent working on the grounds. When at last I retired to my room in accordance with instructions, Colonel Markesan had not reappeared.

I had been in my room scarcely a half-hour when I heard the sharp sound of iron grating on iron—the sound of a bolt sliding home just beyond my threshold. For a startled moment I sat listening; then, hearing nothing, I rose and cautiously tried the door. It was locked from the outside. I felt a chill apprehension upon reflecting that Colonel Markesan had certainly not been in the house when I had gone to my room, and I had not heard a sound to indicate that any one had since entered. Yet the Colonel must have returned.

I went to bed that night with reluctance.

Next morning some one had slipped the bolt on my door before dawn. There was no sign of my employer, nor did he appear during the forenoon. Yet, while I was working toward noon in the deeply shaded grounds just behind the house, I happened to look upward, and saw the unmistakable gray-white face and lustrous eyes of my employer gazing at me from a second floor window! Even as I looked, he vanished from sight.

My momentary amazement, however, was dissipated when I reflected that Colonel Markesan could easily have returned to the house by the front way while I was engaged in the rear. For an instant I thought that he was for some reason in hiding in the house, but that that thought was groundless I learned when I met him later in the day moving effortlessly along the lower hall. His eyes passing fleetly over my face as he nodded, left an inexplicable impression of something to be feared. Yet Colonel Markesan was outwardly an attractive man in his sixties, with firm and harmonious features, and there was no reason for the persistence of the sinister feeling my momentary encounter with him had inspired.

That night again I had hardly gone to my room when I heard the bolt slide to, but by this time I had come to the conclusion that my employer was an eccentric whose wages compensated me for whatever idiosyncrasies I was forced to tolerate.

In this fashion a week went by. Now and then I caught sight of my

singular employer, but in all that time his sole conversation with me concerned his life in Virginia, from where he had evidently returned to Massachusetts, his native state. I learned, too, that the house in which we were living was over a century and a half old, and had always been the property of the Markesan family. I did not once encounter the colonel beyond the house. Meanwhile, my work went along well, and I lived pleasantly enough.

On the tenth night after I had taken up residence with Colonel Markesan, my sleep was disturbed by a sound from below, a sound that to my semiconscious ears bore a startling resemblance to a man's shout. I was awake instantly. The sound recurred, together with what seemed to be a woman's muffled scream. Following these sounds came a low murmur as of many voices whispering somewhere in the house. Apparently Colonel Markesan had visitors, though having visitors seemed incongruous with my employer's personality. I listened until the murmur from below ebbed from my consciousness and sleep overcame me.

In the morning I looked casually for any signs of the presence of others besides Colonel Markesan, but found none. Not a chair had been misplaced, not a footprint disturbed the dusty ground about the doors leading from the house. Yet there remained no doubt in my mind of what I had heard in the night. The memory troubled me all day, and when I began to put together the other strange factors relating to my employment—Colonel Markesan's odd appearances and disappearances, the conditions under which I remained nightly in my room, the colonel's uncanny personal appearance—I was alarmed and uneasy.

I brooded on the matter until my curiosity and vague fear mounted to such a degree that I could no longer rest. I had to know what went on in the house at night, and accordingly, I immediately went to work on my door, making an aperture between door and casement so that I could, by means of a thin steel rod, slip the bolt from within. That night, I determined, I would try to ascertain what went on below, even at the risk of discovery and discharge.

Shortly after I retired to my room, the bolt slipped to as usual. Again, despite the most intense concentration, I did not hear footfalls



However, since the stairs and halls of the old house were deeply carpeted, lightly treading feet would make little sound

I waited. And then abruptly, the whispering began from below

For a few minutes I listened with my ear against the door. Then I took off my shoes and manipulated the bolt; it slipped back without the slightest sound. I turned the knob, and pulled the door back, then slipped quietly out into the hall and made my way down the stairs to a landing. Then I looked down over the banister.

Below me, limned in the strange green light which once before had attracted my eye, was the entrance to the drawing-room, into which I could look easily. There were six people in the glow of the green candles. One of them was my employer, and of them all, he alone seemed to be enjoying himself, for his usually immobile face was broken by a smile. The faces of the others were indistinct, and one visitor, sitting far back from the light, caused me a thrill of horror, for it seemed as if he had no face. The source of the whispering was now perfectly clear, for as I watched I saw Colonel Markesan address one after the other of his visitors, and I waited with marked eagerness for their replies. It occurred to me uneasily that Colonel Markesan's guests were not in the house voluntarily, for there emanated from them an atmosphere of hostility so distinct that I felt it even on the stairs.

Suddenly one of the visitors rose and made for the door, forcing me back up the stairs and into my room, but not before I saw Colonel Markesan bar the way by occupying the threshold and heard his rasping voice, "I am master—you can do nothing unless I will it!"

The face of the man who had tried to force his way from the room was familiar. I again slipped the bolt to, and in the quiet of my room searched my memory for clues to his identity—Symphony Hall—the Saturday evening concerts—the man who used to sit across the aisle from me—Doctor Merlin Grant, Harvard physicist! But Doctor Grant had been dead three months—had been drowned while on vacation at Annisquam. Horror ran suddenly through me, for my conviction was unshakable: though dead, Merlin Grant was downstairs in Colonel Markesan's drawing-room!

That night I did not sleep.



As early as possible next morning I examined the dusty paths leading to the house—and there was no footprint save mine to mar the ground near the doors! My astonishment was unbounded, for certainly my employer had had guests in the night. Though, upon waking, I had momentarily thought that my glance of Doctor Grant the previous night was an illusion, I now began to reconsider cautiously. Suddenly a terrifying thought struck me—could it be that not only had I indeed not erred—that I had actually seen the dead Merlin Grant in the night, but that all those eery visitors were as dead as he?

I thrust the horrible fear from me, yet I could not forget. That day I went into Boston and looked up Colonel Markesan in the Public Records Office and in newspaper files. Though I learned little about my employer, I was considerably agitated and shocked to find that he was the same Robert Crawford Markesan, the Harvard professor, who, after a scandalous affair precipitated by his avowal that he could raise the dead, was summarily dropped from Harvard's austere staff. His "lapse" was quickly forgotten, and Professor Markesan had retired to Virginia, where he assumed the title of Colonel. Of his activities in recent years there was no information.

It was not until some hours had passed that my sluggish mind began to piece together a ghastly connection between what I read and what I had seen the preceding night. The thought of returning to the house in the pine grove became every moment more unattractive. Yet, despite my strong impulse not to go back, I did return shortly after noon.

That night I watched again.

The bolt had hardly been closed before I pried it back and stepped into the deserted hall. As I stood there, I heard the rear door of the house close softly. I made my way rapidly down the stairs and cautiously opened the door.

The vague and shadowy figure of Colonel Markesan was visible in the dusk of the descending night. He was crossing the lawn under the trees, and had evidently struck out for a little path running through fields and private estates into Cambridge. But if he contemplated going into the city, why didn't he take the shorter highway running past the house?

For only a moment I hesitated. Then I stepped from the house, sped into the darkening shadows, and followed him. Fortunately, the path was heavily shrouded by bushes on either side, so that it was possible to vanish instantly into the brush. Colonel Markesan moved along at extraordinary speed, increasing as the distance from the house widened. He seemed no longer to walk, but to glide along in a queer flapping motion.

We had gone slightly over half a mile when Colonel Markesan abruptly left the path, and when I came to the spot where he had diverged, I was astonished to find that he had disappeared. There was but one place he might have gone—nearby Mount Auburn Cemetery, one of whose side gates was not ten steps from the path.

I ran forward silently and looked cautiously through the bars of the gate. Colonel Markesan was in the cemetery, walking slowly down a long lane cutting deep into the burial ground. I attempted to open the gate to follow, but I found it locked. However, my surprise was somewhat abated when I discovered a loose bar which would have enabled a man as thin as my employer to enter, though I reflected immediately that Colonel Markesan had accomplished his entrance in a remarkably short time. But my conjectures were abruptly dropped, for my employer had paused before a tomb not far from the side gate.

He stood for some moments in dead silence. Then he began to talk in his sibilant voice, now potent with sinister menace which sent a shudder through me. I crouched back against the stone wall.

Then, before my eyes, an extraordinary thing took place. As Colonel Markesan spoke, a faint radiance began to glow near the door of the vault, and as I watched, it began to take form, growing darker, apparently more solid. And then, in the space of a minute, a man stood at Colonel Markesan's side!

My horror mounted, but my impulse to flee was drowned in my curiosity. Colonel Markesan was moving forward, beckoning with one hand to the thing from the tomb, which followed obediently. The two of them stopped at a second tomb, where once again Colonel Markesan repeated his hellish procedure. This time a woman was drawn to join the man, and together those two went flapping after the colonel.

Then I turned and fled, the memory of those pathetic and terrible ghosts haunting my flight.

Back at the house, I bolted myself into my room. I wanted to go away, but I lacked the courage; I feared that Colonel Markesan might suspect and follow me into the city. Yet I could not again endure what went on below, knowing not what hellish sorcery drew the dead from their tombs! I solved the problem at last by taking two veronal tablets, and before any sound from below broke into my somnolence, I slept.

Despite what I had seen, I could not go in search of Colonel Markesan next morning and tell him I was leaving. I was held back, too, by the vague hope that I might somehow prevent him from exercising his magic powers. Thinking along this line, I formulated a plan, and as the first step, I went into Cambridge and called upon Professor Karl Hohlden of Harvard's science department, one of the men whose name had been linked with the Markesan scandal years before. Since I myself had done work under Hohlden some years ago, he received me cordially.

I plunged at once into the story of the weird occurrences. At the mention of my employer's name, Hohlden went oddly pale.

"Did you say *Markesan*? You can't mean Professor Markesan?" he asked.

I nodded. "He calls himself Colonel now," I explained.

"Can you describe the man?"

I described Colonel Markesan briefly, and my description agitated Professor Hohlden very much.

"I'm afraid such things can't be, Bancroft," he said when I had finished. "They just don't happen. Perhaps you've been suffering from mental shock, or perhaps you've been reading about that affair at the university some years ago and have begun to imagine things."

I laughed hollowly. "Unfortunately, such is not the case," I replied. "I could wish it were. My experience has been too distressingly real."

I saw abruptly that Professor Hohlden was not very firm in his disbelief in my story. He rose suddenly and left the room, murmuring something about sending a telegram.

When he returned, he seemed calmer.



With infinite patience, he went over the facts of my story with me, and in the end he admitted that if delusion were ruled out, then mine was the only explanation. But though outwardly he continued to think that everything I had seen was delusion bordering upon madness, there was in his words a strong suggestion of belief.

"I'm afraid you think I'm mad as a hatter," I said at last. "I could wish that, too. But I don't think I am. I want you to come out there with me—tonight. I want you to stay through the night. I want you to *see!*"

At this moment a telegram was handed in to Professor Hohlden. Eagerly he ripped open the envelope and read the message. His face paled, and for a moment he stood with closed eyes. Then he turned to me and said, "I'll go with you."

At the same time he handed the telegram to me, saying, "Read it. I was afraid of that."

I took the telegram and read it:

"Colonel Markesan died three years ago. Buried on family estate outside Cambridge."

I groaned. "I should have known, if it weren't so impossible," I said. For I knew now why Colonel Markesan kept to the darkest part of the house, why his footsteps were soundless, why he could vanish so quickly at will, why he left no tracks in the dust beyond the house. "But what can we do now?" I asked. "How can we find a dead man?"

"Wait," cautioned Professor Hohlden. "Wait until I've seen what's going on in his house."

I called the Markesan house, but it was only after repeated trials that I heard my employer's voice on the wire. I asked him whether it would be all right for me to bring an old friend for the night, a friend who understood the conditions as I knew them. Colonel Markesan agreed only with a reluctance which he took no pains to conceal.

Thus it was that, shortly after dinner, which we had in Cambridge, Professor Hohlden and I arrived at the house, where we went immediately to my room. Colonel Markesan was not in evidence. Since it was not yet time for me to retire to my room for the night, Hohlden,



realizing that he might be recognized by his old colleague if he ventured from the room, suggested that I go out to the family vault and see if indeed the colonel rested there.

The vault was set in the close-pressing bushes beyond the shed at the rear of the house. I played safe, and went first into the shed, from which I looked warily back toward the house, searching every window. There was no one at watch, I felt sure. Then I slipped from the single window in the back wall of the shed, and under cover of the bushes made my way to the vault.

It opened easily enough. Inside, one wall was lined with a row of name-plates, marking coffins sealed in rock. I looked for that of Colonel Markesan, but failed to find it. As I turned to leave the vault, I caught sight of one of the name plates which had been lifted out of place and set on the floor, and saw that the space for the coffin gaped empty. I turned the plate over and read:

*Robert Crawford Markesan*

*Born 17 May, 1867—Died 7 April, 1929*

The coffin had obviously been removed to some other place on the estate, and so I pointed out to Professor Hohlden upon my return to my room. "And that means an intensive search, for the estate is large," I added.

But Professor Hohlden shook his head. "I don't think so. I'm sure the coffin will be somewhere in the house; otherwise there could have been no better hiding place than the vault."

While we were sitting in silence shortly after, the bolt of my door slipped to. Hohlden was impressed at this first evidence of my strange story, and it was clear that his disbelief was fading rapidly. We took off our shoes and sat waiting.

About two hours after we had retired to my room, the sound of voices rose from below. I slipped back the bolt, and the professor and I went into the hall.

I led the way cautiously to the landing on the stairs. There we looked into the shadowy gathering below, seeing the weirdly green faces of men both of us knew to be long dead.

Almost at once Hohlden gripped my arm convulsively "Good God!" he exclaimed, " Charing, Grant, Latimer!"

I warned him to be silent, but he did not hear me "Look," he continued, " the little man in the corner; he's Charing, my old colleague, dead eight years he was one of us who forced Markesan out They all belong to our group, every one of them."

I saw Charing huddled in a chair, his grey-green face twisted with pain. As we watched, Markesan approached and began to taunt him. We caught references to the power of the mind over death and the souls and bodies of the dead. But the scene proved too much for Hohlden, who turned abruptly and retreated to my room. I followed, and found him collapsed in a chair.

"Charing, poor devil!" he murmured "And Grant, and Latimer, and the others! Bancroft, we've got to end this!"

"But how?" I asked

"We must find Markesan's body and destroy it. Good God! who could have dreamed that he might be right—that he had control of some secret—magic or scientific—that gave him power over the dead? He goes to the graves, you said, and draws them forth. His power is probably hypnotic, and yet it's hard to tell. He's proved his original point—that the spirits of the dead do exist in some place beyond earth."

A cry from below interrupted Hohlden. We sat looking at each other with haggard eyes.

"Now," said Hohlden suddenly. "We've got to do it now—we can't wait another minute I can't stand the thought of this meaningless torture for the rest of the night."

"But wait," I cautioned. "Markesan will see and recognize us."

"Of course he will! That won't make any difference. He has no power over the living—he is master only over the dead "

Snatching the lamp from the bureau, Hohlden flung back the door and strode out into the hall, his eyes gleaming fiercely. From the landing we saw that Colonel Markesan, having doubtless heard the sound of the door and Hohlden's careless footsteps, stood looking upward, his lustrous green eyes fixed balefully upon us

I hesitated, but Hohlden did not. Straight down the stairs he went. Colonel Markesan came forward, and the two of them met at the threshold of the drawing-room. Colonel Markesan averted his face from the glare of the lamp.

"So Bancroft brought you, Hohlden," he murmured.

"I've come to end this, Markesan," said Hohlden harshly.

As he spoke he thrust the lamp rudely into Markesan's face, causing the colonel to stumble backward.

"You don't like the light, do you, Markesan?" said Hohlden. "You never did, I remember—always preferred the dark. You will have plenty of darkness soon."

He had been advancing upon the colonel as Markesan was falling back into the room, and he continued to thrust the lamp forward. Then suddenly Colonel Markesan flung himself backward and away through heavy portiers, between two book cases.

His move came so suddenly that for a moment Hohlden was too surprised to pursue. Then he leapt forward, and I followed. But Colonel Markesan was not in the adjoining room. Frantically Hohlden ran the length of the room and out into the hall. Still there was no sign of Colonel Markesan.

"No use losing our heads," said Hohlden then. "He's in the house somewhere. We've got to find him. I think if we can manage to decapitate him, we'll end his horrible undead existence. We've got to find the place where he hides."

We began a systematic search through the entire house. I carried my revolver. Because we had at first looked only cursorily into the attic and cellar, we went over them a second time. And yet we did not find Colonel Markesan.

Finally we returned to the drawing-room. Dawn was penetrating the heavy pines around the house, and it would soon be light enough to aid our search. But as Hohlden preceded me into the drawing room, he gave a sharp cry of dismay.

I peered over his shoulder and saw oddly crumpled bodies—most of which were not bodies at all, but weird masses of still white flesh. In

our haste to capture the colonel, we had forgotten his unfortunate victims.

'Good God,' Hohlden muttered, "how can we get these back to their graves? How can we explain—*we can't!*"

He turned on me in horror. "And we can't leave them here! We've got to look until we find, Bancroft."

"But we have looked everywhere," I protested

He nodded, disturbed. Then suddenly he turned. "No, we haven't!" he exclaimed. "We haven't looked behind the wood in the wood cellar!"

He bolted from the room and descended directly into the wood cellar.

"See," he said, "those fire-logs—how far out they're piled. He's here—he must be!"

He began to tear them away. He had not gone far when I saw the top of the coffin, standing on end behind the wood. We pulled away the logs until we had cleared the whole space before it.

But the most ghastly part of our task was yet before us. Even the professor hesitated a moment to attack the coffin with our only tool, an ax which stood against the wall, and which must later perform an even more disagreeable task of which I hesitated to think. We had little trouble with the coffin, for the lid swung open easily, and there before us was the body of Colonel Markesan!

The corpse was clothed in a stiff black suit that had turned a little green. The face was gray-white, the mouth and cheeks sunken, the eyes closed. A faint odor of medicine came from the coffin.

The professor motioned me to stand away, and raised the ax to strike. Then, to our horror, the eyelids of the corpse began to flutter, the corners of its mouth began to twitch, and arm moved slightly—*the thing before us was coming to life!*

Hohlden brought the ax downward, and at the same instant a stiff arm shot out from the coffin and clutched at the handle. Then Colonel Markesan came to furious life. His dark eyes fully open, he stumbled awkwardly from the confining coffin, tore the ax from Hohlden's nerveless fingers, and flung it into the woodpile. Then, with automatic precision, the dead man's arms reached for Hohlden.



How that dead thing fought! Like a machine, taking blow after blow without apparent injury, striking again and again. I do not know how long I stood frozen with horror, watching that unnatural battle, until my eyes fell upon the ax in the corner. Then I set the lamp on the woodpile, scrambled for the weapon, and struck blindly at the thing which was bearing Professor Hohlden to the floor.

My blow laid open the back of Colonel Markesan's neck. He fell, crumpling grotesquely, and a frightful greenish-red liquid began to ooze from the cut.

Instantly the professor was at my side. He tore the ax from my hands and with one stroke decapitated the body. The head of Colonel Markesan rolled awkwardly away in a half-circle, coming to rest finally against Professor Hohlden's ankle. As Hohlden jerked his foot away, a sharp cry of pain escaped his lips.

Perhaps the professor was too quick in moving his leg, perhaps the ghastly life which had animated the body yet moved the severed head, for I saw that somehow Colonel Markesan's teeth had caught and ripped open the flesh of Hohlden's ankle.

For a fleeting moment I had the horrible impression that the awful eyes in the head were open—then I kicked the head frantically away.

"God!—let's get out of here." I murmured.

Hohlden nodded weakly, took a step forward, and almost collapsed. Amazed, he looked down at the slight wound on his ankle. It was purpling rapidly.

"Good God!" muttered Hohlden, "poison—whatever it was that gave Markesan his awful life—"

Hohlden grasped frantically at his throat, then pitched forward.

I came to my knees at his side, catching up his head. He opened his lips weakly, then his head lolled to one side. So lethal was the fluid in Colonel Markesan's body that Hohlden was dead within two minutes after having been bit.

For a moment I was too stunned to move. Then I thought of escape, came to my feet, and ran from the cellar. But I was only half-way up the stairs when I realized that I could never hope to tell any one of what had gone on here, that furthermore, I could not leave those pathetic

remains in the drawing room I must destroy them, even as I must destroy the body of the fiend who had brought them here from their graves. And so, too, Professor Hohlden's death must be concealed.

Reluctantly, yet swiftly, I returned to the cellar. I took up the lamp and threw it with all my might against a pile of kindling, where it exploded and immediately set the wood on fire.

Then I fled the house, leaving that accursed building in the pines a roaring inferno of flames which consumed all that was mortal of Colonel Markesan and his unfortunate victims, and brought eternal rest to the tortured dead in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

## *The Return of Andrew Bentley*

It is with considerable hesitation that I here chronicle the strange incidents which marked my short stay at the old Wilder homestead on the banks of the Wisconsin River not far from the rustic village of Sac Prairie. My reluctance is not entirely dispelled by the conviction that some record of these events should emphatically be made, if only to stop the circulation of unfounded rumors which have come into being since my departure from the vicinity.

The singular chain of events began with a peremptory letter from my aging uncle, Amos Wilder, ordering me to appear at the homestead, where he was then living with a housekeeper and a caretaker. Communications from my Uncle Amos were not only exceedingly rare but usually tinged with biting and withering comments about my profession of letters, which he held in great scorn. Previous to this note, we had not seen each other for over four years. His curt note hinted that there was something of vital importance to both of us which he wished to take up with me, and though I had no inkling of what this might be, I did not hesitate to go.

The old house was not large. It stood well back in the rambling grounds, its white surface mottled by the shadows of leafy branches in the warm sunlight of the day on which I arrived. Green shutters crowded upon the windows, and the door was tightly closed, despite the day's somnolent warmth. The river was cerulean and silver in the immediate background, and farther beyond, the bluffs on the other side of the river rose from behind the trees and were lost in the blue haze of distance to the north and south.

My uncle had grown incredibly old, and now hobbled about with the aid of a cane. On the morning of my arrival he was dressed in a long, ragged black robe that trailed along the floor; beneath this garment he wore a threadbare black jersey and a pair of shabby trousers. His hair was unkempt, and on his chin was a rough beard, masking this thin, sardonic mouth. His eyes, however, had lost none of their fire, and I felt his disapproval of me as clearly as ever. His expression was that of a man who is faced with an unpleasant but necessary task.

At last, after a rude scrutiny, he began to speak, having first made certain that no one lurked within earshot.

"It's hardly necessary for me to say I'm not too certain I've done a wise thing in choosing you," he began. "I've always considered you somewhat of a milksop, and you've done nothing to change my opinion."

He watched my face closely as he spoke, to detect any resentment that I might feel; but I had heard this kind of speech from him too often before to feel any active anger. He sensed this, apparently, for he went on abruptly.

"I'm going to leave everything I've got to you, but there'll be a condition. You'll have to spend most of your time here, make this your home, of course, and there are one or two other small things you'll have to see to. Mind, I'm not putting anything in my will; I want only your word. Do you think you can give it? Think you can say, 'Yes' to my terms?"

He paused, and I said, "I see no reason why I shouldn't—if you can guarantee that your terms won't interfere with my writing."

My uncle smiled and shook his head as if in exasperation. "Nothing is easier," he replied curtly. "Your time for writing will be virtually unlimited."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Spend most of your time here, as I said before. Let no day go by during which you do not examine the vault behind the house. My body will lie there, and the vault will be sealed, I want to know that I can depend upon you to prevent anything from entering that vault. If at any time you discover that someone has been tampering, you will



find written instructions for your further procedure in my library desk. Will you promise me to attend to these things without too much curiosity concerning them?"

I promised without the slightest hesitation, though there were perplexing thoughts crowding upon my mind.

Amos Wilder turned away, his eyes glittering. Then he looked through the window directly opposite me and began to chuckle in a curiously guttural tone. At last he said, his eyes fixed upon a patch of blue sky beyond the tree near the window, "Good! I'll block him yet! Amos Wilder is still a match for you—do you hear, Andrew?"

What his words might portend I had no means of knowing, for he turned abruptly to me and said in his clipped, curt way, "You must go now, Ellis. I shall not see you again." With that, he left the room, and as if by magic, old Jacob Kinney, the caretaker, appeared to show me from the grounds, his lugubrious face regarding me with apologetic eyes from the doorway through which his master had so abruptly vanished but a moment before.

My uncle's strange words puzzled me, and it occurred to me that the old man was losing his mind. That I then did him an injustice I subsequently learned, but at the time all evidence pointed to mental derangement. I finally contented myself with this explanation, though it did not account for the old man's obvious rationality during most of the conversation. Two points struck me: my uncle had put particular stress upon the suggestion that something might enter his vault. And secondly, what was the meaning of his last words, and to whom was my uncle referring when he said, "I'll block him yet!" and "Amos Wilder is still a match for you—do you hear, Andrew?" Conjecture, however, was futile; for, since I knew very little of my uncle's personal affairs, any guesses I might have made as to his obscure references, if indeed he were not losing his mind, would be fruitless.

I left the old homestead that day in May only to find myself back there again within forty eight hours, summoned by Thomas Weatherbee of Sac Prairie—my uncle's solicitor, whose short telegram apprising me of Amos Wilder's death reached me within three hours of my return to the St. Louis apartment which served me as my temporary home. My

shock at the news of his sudden death was heightened when I learned that the circumstances surrounding his decease indicated suicide.

Weatherbee told me the circumstances of my uncle's singular death. It appeared that Jacob Kinney had found the old man in the very room in which he and I had discussed his wishes only a day before. He was seated at the table, apparently asleep. One hand still grasped a pen, and before him lay a sheet of note-paper upon which he had written my name and address, nothing more. It was presumed at first that he had had a heart attack, but a medical examination had brought forth the suspicion that the old man had made away with himself by taking an overdose of veronal. There was, however, considerable reluctance to presume suicide, for an overdose of veronal might just as likely be accident as suicide. Eventually a coroner's jury decided that my uncle had met his death by accident, but from the first I was convinced that Amos Wilder had killed himself. In the light of subsequent events and of his own cryptic words to me, "I shall not see you again," my suspicion was, I feel, justified, though no definite and conclusive evidence emerged.

My uncle was buried, as he had wished, in the long disused family vault behind the house, and the vault was sealed from the outside with due ceremony and in the presence of witnesses. The reading of the will was a short affair, for excepting bequests made to the housekeeper and caretaker, I inherited everything. My living was thus assured, and as my uncle had said, I found the future holding many hours of leisure in which to pursue letters.

And yet, despite the apparent rosiness of the outlook, there was from the first a peculiar restraint upon my living in the old homestead. It was indefinable and strange, and numerous small incidents occurred to supplement this odd impression. First old Jacob Kinney wanted to leave. With great effort I persuaded him to stay, and dragged from him his reason for wanting to go.

"There've been mighty strange things a-goin' on about this house, Mr. Wilder, all the time your uncle was alive—and I'm afraid things'll be goin' on again after a bit."

More than that cryptic utterance I could not get out of him. I took the liberty shortly after to repeat Kinney's words to the housekeeper,

Mrs. Seldon. The startled expression that passed over her countenance did not escape me, and her immediate assurance that Jake Kinney was in his dotage did not entirely reassure me.

Then there was the daily function of examining the seal on the vault. The absurdity of my uncle's request began to grow on me, and my task, trivial as it was, became daily more irritating. Yet, having given my promise, I could do no more than fulfill it.

On the third night following my uncle's interment, my sleep was troubled by a recurrent dream which gave me no little thought when I remembered its persistence on the following day. I dreamed that my Uncle Amos stood before me, clad as I had last seen him on the visit just preceding his strange death. He regarded me with his beady eyes, and then abruptly said in a mournful and yet urgent voice, "You must bring Burkhardt back here. He forgot to protect me against them. You must get him to do so. If he will not, then see those books on the second shelf of the seventh compartment of my library."

This dream was repeated several times, and it had a perfectly logical basis, which was briefly this. My uncle was buried by Father Burkhardt, the Sac Prairie parish priest, who was not satisfied with the findings of the coroner's jury, and consequently, in the belief that Amos Wilder had killed himself, had refused to bless the grave of a suicide. Yet, what the dream-shape of the night before had obviously meant when he spoke of what Father Burkhardt had forgotten to do, was the blessing of the grave.

I spent some time mulling over this solution of the dream, and at length went to see the priest. My efforts, however, were futile. The old man explained his attitude with great patience, and I was forced to agree with him.

On the following night the dream recurred, and in consequence, since a visit to Father Burkhardt had already failed to achieve the desired effect, I turned, impelled largely by curiosity, to the books on the second shelf of the seventh compartment indicated by the dream-figure of my uncle. From the moment that I opened the first of those books, the entire complexion of the occurrences at the homestead changed inexplicably, and I found myself involved in a chain of



incidents, the singularity of which continues to impress me even as I write at this late date. For the books on the second shelf of the seventh compartment in my dead uncle's library were books on black magic—books long out of print, and apparently centuries old, for in many of them the print had faded almost to illegibility.

The Latin in which most of the books were written was not easily translated, but fortunately it was not necessary for me to search long for the portions indicated by my uncle, for in each book paragraphs were marked for my attention. The subjects of the marked portions were strangely similar. After some difficulty I succeeded in translating the first indicated paragraph to catch my eye. "For Protection from Things That Walk in the Night," it read. "There are many things stalking abroad by darkness, perhaps ghouls, perhaps evil demons lured from outer space by man's own ignorance, perhaps souls isolated in space, havenless and alone, and yet strongly attached to the things of this earth. Let no bodies be exposed to their evil wrath. Let there be all manner of protection for vaults and graves, for the dead as well as the living, for ghouls, incubi, and succubi haunt the near places as well as the far, and seek always to quench the fire of their unholy desire . . . Take blessed water from a church and mix it with the blood of a young babe, be it ever so small a measure, and with this cross the grave at the door of the vault thrice at the fall of the moon."

If this was what my Uncle Amos desired me to do, I knew at once that the task had devolved upon the wrong man; for I could certainly not see myself going about collecting holy water and the blood of a young child and then performing ridiculous rites over the vault with an odious mixture of the two. I put the books aside and returned to my work, which seemed suddenly more inviting than it had ever been before.

Yet what I had read disturbed me, and the suggestion that my uncle had come to believe in the power of black magic—perhaps even more than this, for all I knew—was extremely distasteful to me. In consequence, my writing suffered, and immediately after my supper that evening, I went for a long walk on the river bank.

A half-moon high in the sky made the countryside bright and



clear, and since the night was balmy and made doubly inviting by the sweet mystery of night sounds—the gasping and gurgling of the water, the splashing of distant fish, the muted cries of night birds, particularly the *peent, peent* of the nighthawk and the eery call of the whippoorwill, and the countless mysterious sounds from the underbrush in the river bottoms—I extended my walk much farther than I had originally intended, so that it was shortly after midnight when I approached the house again, and the moon was close upon the western horizon.

As I came quietly along in the now still night, my eye caught a movement in the shadowy distance. The movement had come from the region of the large old elm which pressed close upon the house near the library window, and it was upon this tree that I now fixed my eyes. I had not long to wait, for presently a shadow detached itself from the giant bole and went slowly around the house toward the darkness behind. I could see the figure quite clearly, though I did not once catch sight of its face, despite the fact that the man, for man it was, wore no hat. He walked with a slight limp, and wore a long black cape. He was near medium height, but quite bent, so that his back was unnaturally hunched. His hands were strikingly white in the fading light of the moon, and he walked with a peculiar flapping motion, despite his obvious limp. He passed beyond the house with me at his heels, for I was determined to ascertain if possible what design had brought him to the old house.

I lost sight of him for a few moments while I gained the shelter of the house, but in a minute I saw him again, and with a gasp of astonishment realized that he was making directly for the vault in which my Uncle Amos lay buried. I stifled an impulse to shout at him, and made my way cautiously in the shadow of a row of lilac bushes toward the vault, before which he was now standing. The darkness here was intense, owing to the fact that the trees from the surrounding copse pressed close upon this corner of the estate; yet I could see from my crouching position that the mysterious intruder was fumbling with the seals of the vault. My purpose in following him so closely was to collar him while he was engaged with the seals, but this design was now for the moment thwarted by his stepping back to survey the surface of the vault door. He remained standing in silence for some

while, and I had almost decided that it might be just as easy to capture him in this position, when he moved forward once more. But this time he did not fumble with the seals. Instead, he seemed to flatten himself against the door of the vault. Then, incredible as it may seem, his figure began to grow smaller, to shrink, save for his gaunt and gleaming white fingers and arms!

With a strangled gasp, I sprang forward.

My memory at this point is not quite clear. I remember seizing the out-stretched fingers of the man at the vault door, feeling something within my grasp. Then something struck me at the same moment that the intruder whirled and leaped away. I had the fleeting impression that a second person had leaped upon me from behind. I went down like a log.

I came to my senses not quite an hour later, and lay for a moment recalling what had happened. I remembered having made a snatch at the intruder's fingers, and being struck. There was an appreciable soreness of the head, and a sensitive bruise on my forehead when finally I felt for it. But what most drew my attention was the thing that I held tightly in my left hand, the hand which had grasped at the strangely white fingers of the creature pressed against the door of the Wilder vault. I had felt it within my grasp from the first moment of consciousness, but from its roughness, I had taken it for a small twig caught up from the lawn. In consequence, it was not until I reached the security of the house that I looked at it. I threw it upon the table in the dim glow of the table lamp—and almost fell in my utter amazement; for the thing I had held in my hand was a fragment of human bone—the unmistakable first two joints of the little finger!

This discovery loosed a flood of futile conjectures. Was it after all a man I had surprised at the vault, or was it—something else? . . . That my uncle was in some way vitally concerned now became apparent, if it had not been entirely so before. The fact that Amos Wilder had looked for some such interruption of his repose in the old vault led me to believe that whatever he feared derived from some source in the past. Accordingly, I gave up all conjecture for the time, and promised

myself that in the morning I would set on foot inquiries designed to make me familiar with my secluded uncle's past life.

I was destined to receive a shock in the morning. Determined to prosecute my curiosity concerning my uncle without loss of time, I summoned Jacob Kinney, whose surliness had noticeable increased during the few days I had been at the old Wilder house. Instead of asking directly about my uncle, I began with a short account of the figure I had seen outside the preceding night.

"I was out quite late last night, Jake," I began, "and when I came home I noticed a stranger on the grounds."

Kinney's eyebrows shot up in undisguised curiosity, but he said nothing, though he began to exhibit signs of uneasiness which did not escape my notice.

"He was about five feet tall, I should say, and wore no hat," I went on. "He wore a long black cape, and walked with a slight limp."

Abruptly Kinney came to his feet, his eyes wide with fear. "What's that you say?" he demanded hoarsely. "Walked with a limp—wore a cape?"

I nodded, and would have continued my narrative, had not Kinney cut in.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Andrew Bentley's back!"

"Who's Andrew Bentley?" I asked.

But Kinney did not hear. He had whirled abruptly and run from the room as fast as his feeble legs would allow him to go. My astonishment knew no bounds, nor did subsequent events in any way lessen it; for Jacob Kinney ran not only from the house, but from the grounds, and his flight was climaxed shortly after by the appearance of a begrimed youth representing himself as the old man's nephew, who came for 'Uncle Jake's things.' From him I learned that Kinney was leaving his position at once, and would forfeit any wages due him, plus any amount I thought fit to recompense me for his precipitate flight.

Kinney's unaccountable action served only to sharpen my already keen interest, and I descended upon Mrs. Seldon posthaste. But the information which she was able to offer me was meager indeed. Andrew Bentley



had arrived in the neighborhood only a few years back. He and my uncle had immediately become friends, and the friendship, despite an appearance of strain, had ended when Bentley mysteriously disappeared about a year ago. She confirmed my description of the figure I had seen as that of Bentley. Mrs. Seldon, too, was inexplicably agitated, and when I sought to probe for the source of this agitation she said only that there were some very strange stories extant about Bentley, and about my uncle as well, and that most of the people in the neighborhood had been relieved of a great fear when Bentley disappeared from the farm adjoining the Wilder estate. This farm, which he had inhabited for the years of his residence, but had not worked, and had yet always managed to exist without trouble, was now uninhabited. This, together with a passing hint that Thomas Weatherbee might be able to add something, was the sum of what Mrs. Seldon knew.

I lost no time in telephoning Weatherbee and making an appointment for that afternoon. On the way to the attorney's office I had ample time to think over the events of the last ten days. That it was Andrew Bentley whom my Uncle Amos had referred to when he spoke so cryptically with me before his death, I had no longer any doubt. Evidently then, he, too, feared his strange neighbor, but now he hoped to thwart any attempt that Bentley might make to get the body—for what reason he might want it I could not guess—by means of black magic, was beyond my comprehension.

Thomas Weatherbee was a short and rather insignificant man, but his attitude was conducive to business, and he made clear to me that he had only a limited time at my disposal. I came directly to the matter of Andrew Bentley.

"Andrew Bentley," began Weatherbee with some reluctance, "was a man with whom I had no dealings, with whom I cared to have none. I have seldom met any one whose mere presence was so innately evil. Your uncle took up with him, it is true, but I believe he regretted it to the end of his days."

"What exactly was wrong with Bentley?" I cut in.

Weatherbee smiled grimly, regarded me speculatively for a moment or two, and said, "Bentley was an avowed sorcerer."



"Oh, come," I said, "that sort of thing isn't believed in any more." But a horrible suspicion began to grow in my mind.

"Perhaps not generally," replied Weatherbee at once. "But I can assure you that most of us around here believe in the power of black magic after even so short acquaintance as ours with Andrew Bentley. Consider for a moment that you have spent the greater part of your life in a modern city, away from the countrysides where such beliefs flourish, Wilder."

He stopped with an abrupt gesture, and took a portfolio from a cabinet. From this he took a photograph, looked at it with a slight curl of disgust on his lips, and passed it over to me.

It was a snapshot, apparently made surreptitiously, of Andrew Bentley, and it had been taken evidently at considerable risk after sunset, for the general appearance of the picture led me to assume that its vagueness was caused by the haziness of dusk—a supposition which Weatherbee confirmed. The figure, however, was quite clear, save for blurred arms, which had evidently been moving during the exposure, and for the head. The view had been taken from the side, and showed Andrew Bentley, certainly identified for me by the long cape he wore, standing as if Bentley could have stood quietly during the exposure with no incentive to do so, and I commented upon it at once.

Weatherbee looked at me queerly. "Wilder," he said, "there was another person there—or should I say thing? And this thing was directly in line with the lens, for he was standing very close to Bentley—and yet, there is nothing on the snapshot, nor is there any evidence on the exposed negative itself that any one stood there; for, as you can see, the landscape is unbroken."

It was as he said.

"But this other person," I put in. "He was seen, and yet does not appear. Apparently the camera was out of focus, or the film was defective."

"On the contrary. There are logical explanations for the nonappearance of something on a film. You can't photograph a dream. And you can't photograph something that has no material form—I say *material*

advisedly—even though our own eyes give that thing a physical being.”

“What do you mean?”

“Father Burkhardt would call it a familiar,” he said, clipping his words. “A familiar, in case you don’t know, is an evil spirit summoned by a sorcerer to wait upon his desires. That tall, gaunt man was never seen by day—always by night, and never without Bentley. I can give you no more of my time now, but if you can bring yourself to accept what I have to say at face value, I’ll be glad to see you again.”

My interview with Thomas Weatherbee left me considerably shaken, and I found myself discarding all my previously formed beliefs regarding black magic. I went immediately to my late uncle’s store of books, and began to read through them for further information, in the hope that something I might learn would enable me to meet Andrew Bentley on more equal footing, should he choose to call.

I read until far into the night, and what inconceivable knowledge I assimilated lingers clearly in my mind as I write. I read of age-old horror summoned from the abyss by the ignorance of men, of cosmic ghouls that roamed the ether in search of prey, and of countless things that walk by night. There were many legends of familiars, ghastly demons called forth from the depths at the whims of long-dead sorcerers; and it was significant that each legend had been heavily scored along the margins, and in one case the name “Andrew Bentley” was written in my uncle’s hand. In another place my uncle had written, “We are fools to play with powers of whose scope even the wisest of us has no knowledge!”

It was at this point that it occurred to me that my uncle had left a letter of sealed instructions for me in case the vault was tampered with. This letter was to be in the library desk, where I found it with little trouble, a long, legal looking envelope with my name inscribed very formally. The handwriting was undoubtedly my uncle’s, and the letter within was the thing that finally dispelled all doubt from my mind as to the reality of the sorcery that had been and was still being practiced near the Wilder homestead, for it made clear what had happened between my uncle and Andrew Bentley—and that other.

"Mr. Dear Ellis:

If indeed they have come for me, as they must have if you read this, there is but one thing you can do Bentley's body must be found and utterly destroyed; surely there cannot be much left of it now. Perhaps you have seen him in the night when he walks—as I have. He is not alive. I know, because I killed him a year ago—stabbed him with your grandfather's hunting-knife—which must yet lie in his black skeleton.

I think both Burkhardt and Weatherbee suspected that I aided Bentley to his black rites, but that was long before I dreamed of what depths of evil lurked in his soul. And when he began to hound me so, when he brought forward that other, that hellish thing he had conjured up from the nethermost places of evil—could I do otherwise than rid myself of his evil presence? My mind was at stake—and yes, my body. When you read this, only my body is at stake. For they want it—conceive if you can the ghastly irony of my lifeless body given an awful new existence by being inhabited by Bentley's familiar!

"The body—Bentley's body—I put it in the vault, but that other removed it and hid it somewhere on the grounds. I have not been able to find it, and this past year has been a living hell for me—they have hounded me nightly, and though I can protect myself from them, I cannot stop them from appearing to taunt me. And when I am dead, my protection must come from you. But I hope that Burkhardt will have closed his eyes and blessed the vault, for this I think will be strong enough to keep them away—and yet, I cannot tell.

"And perhaps even this is being read too late—for if once they have my body, destroy me, too, with Bentley's remains by fire.

"Amos Wilder."

I put down this letter and sat for a moment in silence. But what thoughts crowded upon my mind were interrupted by an odd sound from outside the window, a sound that was unnaturally striking in the still night. I glanced at my watch; it was one o'clock in the morning. Then I turned out the small reading-lamp and moved quietly toward the window, immediately beyond which stood the giant elm beneath which on the previous night I had first seen the ghostly figure of



Andrew Bentley for since he had been killed a year before, what I had seen could have been none other than his specter.

Then a thought struck me that paralyzed me with horror. Suppose I had been struck by *that other*? It seemed to me that the blow which had knocked me out had been struck from behind. At the same instant my eyes caught sight of the faintest movement beyond the window. The moon hung in a hazy sky and threw a faint illumination about the tree, despite the fairly heavy shadow of its overhanging limbs. There was a man pressed close to the bole of the tree, and even as I looked another seemed to rise up out of the ground at his side. And the second man was Andrew Bentley! I looked again at the first, and saw a tall, gaunt figure with malevolent red eyes, *through* whom I could see the line of moonlight and shadow on the lawn beyond the tree. They stood there together for only a moment, and then went quickly around the house—toward the vault!

From that instant events moved rapidly to a climax.

My eyes fixed themselves upon that place in the ground from which the figure of Andrew Bentley had sprung, and saw there an opening in the trunk of the old tree—for the elm was hollow, and its bole held the remains of Andrew Bentley! Small wonder that my uncle had been haunted by the presence of the man he had killed, when his remains were hidden in the tree near the library window!

But I stood there only for a fraction of a minute. Then I went quickly to the telephone, and after an agonizing delay got Weatherbee on the wire and asked him to come out at once, hinting enough of what was happening to gain his assent. I suggested also that he bring Father Burkhardt along, and this he promised to do.

Then I slipped silently from the house into the shadowy garden. I think the sight of those two unholy figures hovering about the door of the vault was too much for me, for I launched myself at them, heedless of my danger. But realization came almost instantly, for Andrew Bentley did not even turn at my appearance. Instead, the other looked abruptly around, fixed me with his red and fiery eyes, smiled wickedly so that his leathery face was weirdly creased, and leisurely watched my



approach. Instinct, I believe, whirled me about and sent me flying from the garden.

The thing was somewhat surprised at my abrupt bolt, and this momentary hesitation on its part I continue to believe is responsible for my being alive to write this. For I knew that I was flying for my life, and I ran with the utmost speed of which I was capable. A fleeting glance showed me that the thing loped after me, a weirdly flapping shape seeming to come with the wind in the moonlight night, and struck shuddery horror into my heart.

I made for the river, because I remembered reading in one of my uncle's old books that certain familiars could not cross water unless accompanied by those whose sorcery had summoned them to earth. I leaped into the cold water, tense with the hope that the thing behind could not follow.

It could not.

I saw it raging up and down along the river bank, impotent and furious at my fortunate escape, while I kept myself afloat in mid-current. The current carried me rapidly downstream, and I kept my eyes fixed upon the thing I had eluded until it turned and sped back toward the vault. Only when I was completely out of its sight did I make for the bank once more.

I ran madly down the road along which Weatherbee and the priest must come, flinging off some of my wet clothes as I went. What was happening at the vault I did not know — at the moment my only thought was temporary safety from the thing whose power I had so thoughtlessly challenged.

I had gone perhaps a half-mile beyond the estate when the head lights of Weatherbee's car swept around a curve and outlined me in the road. The car ground to an emergency stop, and Weatherbee's voice called out. I jumped into the car, and explained as rapidly as I could what had happened.

"You've had a narrow escape, my boy," he said, "a very narrow escape. Now if only we can get to the vault before they succeed in their evil design. Such a fate is too harsh a punishment even for the sins of Amos Wilder."

He shuddered as he spoke, and Weatherbee's face was grim.

None of us wasted a moment when the car came to a stop near the house. Father Burkhardt, despite his age, led the way, marshaling us behind him, for he went ahead with a crucifix extended.

But even he faltered at the horrifying sight that met our eyes when we rounded the house and came into the garden. For the vault was open, and from it emerged the skeletal Bentley and his familiar, and between them they dragged the lifeless body of my Uncle Amos! Burkhardt's hesitation, however, was only momentary, for he ran forward immediately; nor were Weatherbee and I far behind.

At the same moment the two at the vault caught sight of us. With a shrill scream, the tall, gaunt thing loosed his hold of the corpse and launched himself forward. But the crucifix served us well, for the thing fell shuddering away from it. Father Burkhardt immediately pressed his advantage, and following his sharp command, Weatherbee and I rushed at Bentley, who had up to this moment remained beside the corpse, still keeping hold of one dead arm.

But at our advance, Bentley wavered a moment, and then turned and took flight, dodging nimbly past us and running for the house. We were at his heels, and saw him when he vanished in the deep shadows of the tree near the library window.

Father Burkhardt presently made his appearance, walking warily, for the thing was still at bay but eager to attack.

"Find the bones," directed the priest. "They're in the tree, I suspect."

I bent obediently, and presently my searching hand encountered a scooped out hollow in the trunk just above the opening at the base of the tree. In this lay the skeleton of Andrew Bentley, together with the weapon by which he had met his death, and here it had lain ever since the thing Bentley had summoned from the depths had removed the sorcerer's body from the old vault. Small wonder that it had never been discovered!

Father Burkhardt stood protectingly close while Weatherbee and I prepared a pyre to consume the remains of the sorcerer.

"But what can we do about that?" I asked once, pointing to the familiar that now raged in baffled fury just beyond us.

"We need not bother about that," said the priest. "He is held to earth only by the body of the man who summoned him from below. When once that body is destroyed, he must return. That's why they were after your uncle's body. If the familiar could inhabit a body fresh from a new grave, he could walk by day as well as by night, and need have no fear of having to return."

Once or twice the thing did rush at us—but each time its charge was arrested by the power of that crucifix held unfalteringly aloft by Father Burkhardt, and each time the thing shrank away, wailing.

It was over at last, but not without a short period of ghastly doubt. The remains of Andrew Bentley were reduced to ashes, utterly destroyed, and yet the thing Bentley had called from outside lingered beyond us, strangely quiet now, regarding us malevolently.

"I don't understand," admitted Father Burkhardt at last. "Now that Bentley's ashes alone remain, the thing should go back into the depths."

But if the priest did not understand, I did. Abruptly I ran to the library window, raised it as far as it would go, and scrambled into the room. In a moment I emerged, bearing the fragment of Bentley's little finger which I had snatched from the skeletal hand the night before. I threw it into the flames already dying down in the shadow of the tree.

In a moment it had caught fire, and at the same instant the thing hovering near gave a chilling scream of pain and fury, pushed madly toward us, and then abruptly shot into space and vanished like the last fragment of an unholy, ghastly nightmare.

"*Requiescat in pace.*" said Father Burkhardt softly, looking at the ashes at our feet. But the dubious expression in his eyes conveyed his belief that for the now-released spirit of Andrew Bentley a greater and longer torture had just begun.

## *The Woman at Loon Point*

I met Laramie Shaw not long after my arrival at my father's hunting-lodge at the base of Loon Point in Upper Michigan last autumn. Three days after, to be exact. Even before that, I had heard that long deserted Loon Lodge was inhabited, and the natives of Lacroit village, south of my father's cabin, had spoken of the Shaws—"that Laramie, who walks as if she's scared of something," and "that young man, Jim, who's gettin' sicker and sicker instead of better, as he ought." And they spoke of how the Shaws had never been seen either hunting or fishing, but kept to their lodge, where they had been ever since spring. The inhabitants of Loon Lodge were, in fact, a local mystery.

I had been walking along the shore of the Point most of that afternoon, and admit hoping I might meet at least one of the Shaws. I had kept to the fairly well-defined path leading along the lake shore, and had stepped off it only for a few moments to examine a dead bird on the beach, when I heard quick footsteps behind me. I swung around and saw the girl coming out of the forest. She caught sight of my movement and stopped, instinctively taking a step backward. Her eyes were dark and startled and filled with sudden fear. Her cheeks were flushed with the wind, but the rest of her face, except for her large and brooding mouth, was astonishingly pale. She wore an old hunting-jacket, and beneath this a plain black dress, the skirt of which was flapping around her legs in the wind. In an instant her eyes dropped, the fear went out of them, and she passed me without a nod, despite my raising my cap to her. I watched her until she vanished around a bend not far away.

Why had she been afraid?

That night I went into the village to find out more about the Shaws



But my intentions were side-tracked by a topic which, though it had been current for some time, was still far more important to the natives gathered in the village store than the slight mystery of the Shaws.

For some time the villagers had been aware of a wolf in the vicinity. Though the animal had appeared but seldom, it had made several efforts to attack different natives. It had been shot at, of course, and though one woodsman swore that he had wounded the beast, it had been seen loping about subsequent to the shot. Wolves had long been uncommon in northern Michigan, and for years in the immediate past no wolf had been seen near Lacroit. The occasion for the recurrence of this oft-discussed topic that evening was the report that a hunter had spied the beast the previous night on Loon Point, had, indeed, heard it howl, and had shot at it before it had made off into the underbrush. Only when the villagers had talked themselves out was I able to introduce the topic of the Shaws.

But if they had been disappointed in my inability to contribute anything to their wolf-lore, I was much more so in the scant information they were able to give me. No one knew where the Shaws had come from, though the majority of them thought Chicago. They had arrived in late April, both in good health and excellent spirits, and had taken the lodge for two months, meaning to return to the city at the end of that time. It was the girl who had started the story of the wolf's presence by arriving in the village one morning early for a doctor, saying that her brother, who had left Loon Lodge just before dawn, had been attacked and severely lacerated by a wolf. The doctor later admitted that the young man had certainly been bitten by an animal of some kind.

From that time on the boy was seen no more, though before that he had been out quite often, usually alone, but sometimes with a tramp-like individual who apparently lived some distance along the isolated coast above Loon Point. The girl came into Lacroit only when it was absolutely necessary, and struck everyone as looking afraid—glancing over her shoulder all the time, in a strained way, and nervous. When the two months had passed, Laramie Shaw had appeared in Lacroit and had taken Loon Lodge indefinitely. That was the substance of what I learned.

Yet I was curiously disturbed by the concluding aside of the store-keeper's wife—"That Shaw girl used to whistle and sing all the time—now she don't. She don't even smile like she used to. I c'n tell you it ain't a small thing'll make a woman change like that."

When I left Lacroit that night, my mind was filled with thoughts of the Shaws. The chill autumn wind was whistling through the Point's tall pines, and not far away the loons laughed weirdly from the lake. I was in a hurry to reach my lodge, now that darkness had come down in earnest. The distance I had to travel was two miles, and I had gone over three-fourths of the way, when I heard behind me the distinct sound of footsteps. Could my heart leaped unaccountably—could Laramie Shaw have been out, in the village perhaps? I stopped to wait. Immediately the footsteps stopped, but not before I had heard them more distinctly. At the same moment I felt myself warned by blind instinct to press on, and my momentary hearing of the walker behind me acquainted me with the fact that it was no human being that followed; for the footsteps were padding, stealthy, and slunk through the dry leaves like those of some predatory beast.

I turned and ran wildly for the lodge, which was still lost in the blackness ahead. I think that perhaps the thing that saved me was the presence of a screened veranda; for I had no sooner flung myself beyond the screen than I saw two eyes glaring balefully at me from the path I had just quitted, and when I lit one of my lamps and held it aloft, I saw the clearly outlined figure of a gigantic wolf staring at me from immediately beyond the enclosing screen! As I watched, it turned and slunk away into the woods.

Next morning the wolf had taken a secondary place in my mind, and the Shaws had again come forward. If my curiosity must be satisfied, why not go boldly to Loon Lodge and declare myself a recent neighbor come to introduce himself? Certainly that seemed much the best plan.

Consequently, I walked to the end of the Point that morning. But I knocked on the door of Loon Lodge in vain; for no one answered. I was certain that one of the heavy curtains which still strangely covered

the windows moved a little, as though someone peering out had disturbed it. Accordingly, I knocked louder; still no one replied. I went home more curious than before.

That night, which was overcast by lowering clouds driven across the sky by a booming wind, I determined to force a meeting with the Shaws. The restlessness to which I had been a prey since my futile visit of the morning had grown so that sleep was out of the question. The book I tried to read failed to hold my interest; I was thinking of Laramie Shaw and her frightened eyes, and I saw her face on every page I read. I gave up at last, and set out for Loon Lodge.

The curtains were drawn over the windows of the lodge at the end of the Point, but I could see that a light burned in the cabin; for the curtains were frequently broken by slits and tiny holes through which light glowed. I moved carefully forward, intending to take the Shaws by surprise with a sudden assault upon their door. But as I passed a window I paused. There might be no harm in looking momentarily into the room, for if I rapped, the light might be put out and I might go again unanswered.

I stooped down and looked into the room through a rent in the curtain and had to clutch at the window-ledge to keep from falling back in amazement at what I saw within.

Laramie Shaw was standing in the center of the room, disheveled and distraught, and before her was an animal chained to one wall. For an instant I took the animal to be a large and shaggy police dog, and then I saw and recognized it for what it actually was—a *huge timber wolf!*

I felt immediately that there was something deeply wrong about what I saw. The brute's slaverling fangs, its struggles to escape from the binding cords and chain were harmless; for the chain was of steel and the cord was extremely stout. It was as I looked at the rope that I saw how peculiarly the animal was bound—its forelegs tied securely to its chest, the rope having been twisted round and round the body, though surprisingly loose, despite its secureness; its hind legs stretched out and tied together, free of its body. The position in which this manner



of binding left the animal was more than strange, but even more amazing was the patent fact that somehow this ferocious beast had been taken alive—and by a woman aided solely by a sick brother!

Abruptly I thought of Jim Shaw. He was not in the room. And if he were sleeping elsewhere in the cabin, surely it was only a miracle that the disturbance made by the brute had not awakened him.

Laramie Shaw stepped suddenly away from the beast, and leaned weakly against the table. Her face came into sight, and I saw that her eyes were still haunted by that strange look of fear I had first seen in the forest. But I saw also a look of repugnance that was not loathing, and a distinct suggestion of pity for the animal at her feet.

The wolf stirred and began to struggle violently.

At that moment a sound from the blackness of the surrounding forest broke into my puzzled thoughts, cutting through the still weirdly recurring laughter of the loons on the lake. It was the call of a timber wolf, a long drawn-out howl echoing through the woods, and from inside Loon Lodge came a feeble answer.

I bent again and looked through the rent in the curtain. I saw the wolf straining futilely at the binding cords. Laramie Shaw stood for a moment waiting; then she slumped into a chair and put her head in her hands. Her shoulders began to shudder—she was weeping!

The call of the wolf sounded again from the forest. I stood for a moment undecided. If the beast threatened to attack me I had an ideal excuse for getting into Loon Lodge, but I might be forced to break my way in. I had little time to consider, however, for the wolf was rapidly coming nearer, though I could now tell that it was approaching from the opposite side of the lodge. Abruptly I dodged away from the cabin and found the path, along which I ran, hoping that the animal would not follow.

Its cries receded into the distance, and I gathered that the animal was still at Loon Lodge. Could it be its mate that the Shaws had caught?

I had almost reached my cabin, still running easily along the path, when I tripped and went sprawling. For a moment I lay motionless; then I turned cautiously and lit my cigarette-lighter. I had tripped over the recently killed carcass of a rabbit. Its throat had been ripped open



and its blood had evidently been drunk by the killer, for there were but a few drops on the leaves covering the path. I thought at once of a weasel, but certainly no weasel would have ripped open the rabbit's throat as this had been torn. Was it possible that the wolf had paused on its way to Loon Lodge to kill this rabbit? But wolves, I knew, eat their kill.

I went on to my lodge, now doubly welcome after the strange experience I had undergone.

Despite my original intention of airing the Loon Lodge mystery in Lacroit next day, I said nothing about what I had seen. After a short stay in the village, I made my way back along the trail into the forest. I had gone perhaps half the distance to my lodge when I saw before me on the path an emaciated-looking man. He was obviously waiting for me, since he kept his eyes fixed on me.

As I came closer, I saw that he was shabbily dressed, though it was apparent that his clothes had at one time been good. His face held me—deep, black eyes, somehow seeming alive, pale mouth, bloodless cheeks, long stubble on his chin and neck, a heavy mustache on his upper lip. He took a step toward me as I came on, and I saw that he walked with a slight limp.

"I believe you're the young man who has the lodge at the base of the Point?" he said curtly, as I came up to him.

"I'm Jack Durfrey, yes," I said.

"I want a word with you," he went on. His voice had a suggestion of menace in it.

"Walk along?" I asked.

He shook his head. "It'll take only a moment," he went on. "I've seen you about Loon Lodge, and I happen to know that your attentions are unwelcome to the young lady there. I'll thank you to keep away from the Shaws' cabin hereafter."

For a moment I saw red. I controlled myself with an effort and shot back, "You? Who the devil are you to give orders to me?"

"My name," he said in a flat, disdainful voice, "is Henri Lettellier. And that doesn't mean anything to you—and won't unless I find you near Loon Lodge again."

What prevented me from striking out immediately I don't know. Before I could reply, Letellier had stepped back into the dense undergrowth fringing the trail. I took a tentative step forward, thought better of it, and went on my way, in mounting anger.

Almost at once after my return to my cabin, I made my way to Loon Lodge and hid myself in the dense bushes around the clearing in which the lodge stood. The cabin was still tightly closed, but a thin trail of smoke ascending from the chimney gave evidence of life.

I had not long to wait, for suddenly the door opened and a thin young man emerged into the sunlight. He was wearing trousers and an old dressing-gown, which was swinging open. His face was pale and bloodless, and his lips were unhealthily gray. His eyes were dark and shone in such a fashion that I could not doubt that he was seriously ill. He stood for a moment leaning against the house, leaving the door ajar. Then he began to move around the lodge, and in a few moments he was lost to sight behind the building.

Then the door swung wide again, and Laramie Shaw came out. She looked much as she had looked the day before, except that she seemed more wan, and her eyes seemed darker. The morning wind from the lake blew at her black hair, which fell straight to her shoulders. With a slight intake of breath I noticed how beautiful she was. She stood looking uneasily around her, then suddenly called in a low, quavering voice, "Jim! Oh, Jim!"

The young man came from behind the cabin, and the expression of relief on Laramie Shaw's face was immediate. She looked uneasily around, past him, her eyes embracing the encroaching woods, then she stood aside until her brother entered the cabin again. She followed him.

I crouched in hiding for a few moments more. Then I ventured into the clearing and approached the cabin. There was no reply to my assault on the door of Loon Lodge, but I saw the curtains quiver and knew that I was being watched.

For some time I stood undecided on the stoop, not only mystified but also slightly angered; then I doubled back and hid once more in the dense foliage, where I sat and watched the lodge.

It was some time before Laramie Shaw appeared. She opened the

door cautiously and looked out across the clearing. For a few moments she stood framed in the doorway, her head thrown back, her eyes still suspicious. Then she went quickly around to the side of the lodge and began to gather kindling wood.

I left my hiding-place and strode rapidly across to the cabin. Before the woman had time to start, I stood waiting, and there was no escape for her then. Slowly, rather thoughtfully, she advanced toward the door, a query on her face.

"You're Miss Shaw?" I asked.

She nodded and looked at me without emotion, waiting.

"I'm Jack Durfrey, your nearest neighbor."

"Yes," she said.

She was obviously reluctant to talk. I waited insistently, determined that she would speak to me. Presently I said, "I've been up to call before. Perhaps you were out, but I don't think so. If it had not been for someone who's apparently your guardian rather rudely warning me away from this place, I wouldn't have come again."

Suddenly she took interest. She looked sharply at me. "Guardian," she repeated. "Was it?" Her face paled, suddenly, inexplicably.

"Henri Letellier," I said. "That's what he called himself."

She stepped back, dropping the wood she had gathered. For a moment I thought she was going to faint. A low moan escaped her lips. In a moment she had composed herself and was facing me again, defiantly.

Then I tried direct attack. "I want to help you, Miss Shaw," I said.

"What do you mean?" she asked immediately. "I'm not—we're not in need of help—I don't think you've a right to presume that."

I looked hard into her eyes, and she was almost immediately disconcerted.

"I want you to tell me a few things," I went on, "and perhaps I can help."

At this she was definitely disturbed and made an effort to get past me. I caught her arm.

"I saw you last night," I said abruptly.

A cry broke from her lips. She stood away at arm's length, her free hand covering her mouth. Her eyes were wide with unmistakable terror.



With an effort she forced the fear from her eyes, brought her hand from her mouth, and attempted to smile.

"I don't think you could have seen me," she said in a low voice.

"Try to believe me," I said gently "I saw you in your cabin with a bound wolf."

She could not disguise her fright, and yet attempted to laugh, succeeding only in sounding hysterical.

"Both my brother and I went to bed early last night," she said.

"I saw through a rent in the curtain," I persisted.

An angry flush crossed her face "Go away, please," she said

"Very well," I said, "but I'll return tonight—and shoot any wolf I see, whether inside the cabin or not."

A torrent of words fell from her lips. "No, no, please! You must not come back here again. Oh, it may be true --no, no, what am I saying? Of course it isn't true, it can't be! But there's a wolf in the forest I've heard him. You must not be out when he runs. Promise me you won't come back here."

Her voice had gone low, husky, almost sobbing. Tears stood in her eyes. For a moment her emotion disconcerted me.

"I'm sorry," I said. "If you sincerely believe I can't help you, I won't come back."

I heard her breathe an almost inaudible "Thank you," and saw her disappear inside, closing the door behind her.

Despite my promise, I did return to the cabin that night. It had been dark for more than an hour when I arrived at Loon Lodge, but a light glowed from behind the curtains drawn over the windows. I went at once to the closest window, and discovered that the rent through which I had looked into the lodge on the previous night had been repaired. Indeed, all the curtains had been carefully sewed and patched. Laramie Shaw obviously did not intend to allow me a second sight of what happened at night in the cabin.

But I heard the growling and struggling of the bound wolf inside; so I knew that it was there.

On the homeward path I heard again the call of the other wolf coming from the direction of Loon Lodge.



The next night there was a full moon. I took up my watch again, but once more failed utterly to learn anything new and was driven to my lodge by the approach of the other animal and my carelessness in bringing an unloaded weapon with me.

On the next two nights my watch was equally futile. But on the third night after the full moon, there was a slight change. The wolf was in the cabin, but not once did it cry out, not once did it struggle to escape. The wolf that haunted the surrounding forest called from afar, making no attempt to approach Loon Lodge. After that, the imprisoned animal became more and more quiet.

During this time, I saw nothing of the Shaws. I tried once again to call, but my knocks went unanswered. Nevertheless, I continued to watch the cabin, and as a result I discovered that the wolf inside became most violent in the week of the full moon, a violence common to all animals.

Eventually I gave up, though the mystery that brooded over the Shaws lingered in my mind and irritated me by its presence. November had come, and soon I would be leaving again for home.

And then one day, in answer to a furious pounding on my front door shortly after the noon hour, I opened it on Laramie Shaw and looked into her frightened eyes. At once she brushed past me, and closed the door and latched it. Then she turned and faced me, her back to the door, her eyes wild and afraid.

"I've come," she said, jerkingly. "You were the only one I could go to. I've stood it so long—I can't any more."

I saw that she was on the verge of collapse, and pushed forward a chair into which I urged her. Her face was the color of chalk. Her hands were clasped in her lap, her fingers twining together and together.

"I want to do anything I can to help you," I said.

She did not answer at once. She closed her eyes and leaned back; for an instant I thought she had fainted. But she had not, for presently, with visible effort, she forced herself to tell me of the horrible thing that was making her life a torture.

"Those things you said you saw in our lodge," she began slowly. "They were true. I don't know how to explain them."

She paused and looked helplessly at me. Then she began, at a different point, her voice hysterically hurried.

"We came here on a vacation. We had planned to stay for two months. Not long after our arrival, Jim made the acquaintance of an elderly man whom he met in the woods. Though not very well dressed, this man you saw him, you told me he had warned you away from us. Henri Letellier, was intelligent and interesting. He had led a long life of vagabondage, and his narratives held Jim.

"One night we asked him into the lodge for supper with us. He ate nothing but meat, and as the meal progressed he got more and more nervous, and began to look around as if suspicious of something. His conduct alarmed me, and even Jim took notice. Then suddenly, just as the sun was setting, he jumped up and ran from the house without a word of explanation. We were astounded, and naturally Jim went after him.

"Before Jim returned, night had set in, and a moon was glowing above the trees fringing the clearing. And then—with Jim nowhere in sight—I heard the unmistakable howl of a timber wolf from somewhere in the immediate vicinity! Only a split second later I heard Jim crashing through the underbrush, coming toward the lodge. I don't know what I feared, but I ran back into the cabin for Jim's gun.

"Only Providence could have caused me to do that, for when I got outside again, I saw Jim being flung to the ground under the attack of a gigantic timber wolf. I fired and missed, afraid of hitting Jim. But my shot didn't frighten the brute away. It slashed Jim cruelly, dangerously close to his neck. Then I fired again, and that time I struck it—in the leg, I think; for it jumped away and vanished in the forest in a moment.

"I ran to him. He lay moaning on the ground where he had been thrown. I got him into the lodge and bathed the wound and dressed it. Then I went for a doctor. He came and dressed Jim's wound anew, but seemed so incredulous about the scanty details I gave him that we didn't call him again. Fortunately Jim seemed to be resting easily; for there was no need for the doctor again. Toward morning he developed a strange fever and became restless. I was anxious, and became still more so when after a little while he began to make odd, delirious

sounds I bent to listen, and—oh, how can I tell it?—they were animal sounds, unhuman, guttural sounds, and even as I recognized them, there came from Jim's throat what was unmistakably *the low wbine of an animal in pain!*"

She paused and covered her face with her hands "Oh, I can't go on," she sobbed, "I can't—it's so horrible, so unbelievable—you'll think I'm mad."

"Please go on," I said in the most persuasive voice I could summon. I made no move to comfort her, feeling instinctively, that she might resent it.

She looked up. "Perhaps you've guessed the frightful thing that happened. That man—Letellier—is a werewolf—a man doomed to become a beast at sundown, doomed to assume the shape of a savage wolf, a beast whose nourishment is the blood of animals and human beings! And his bite was so venomous, so accursed, that it had contaminated Jim, so that Jim, too, must inevitably change and become as Letellier!"

She looked at me with defiant eyes.

"Go on," I said in a tense voice. I did not want her to see any evidence of the turmoil in my mind. I had fleetingly thought that something had unsettled her mind, but too soon I saw that everything I had seen fitted into this inconceivable tale she was relating. Yet I could not easily believe.

"Jim knew," she went on. "He knew what to expect, for he had been transformed into a werewolf completely—he knew of the terrible blood-lust that would come over him, knew that soon a nightly change of form would begin. He knew that somehow blood from Letellier's veins had entered his own, thus binding him to Letellier. And he felt that if he could be kept from tasting blood in any form for a long time, the spell would be weakened and broken.

"It was at Jim's demand that I tied and chained him the next night—and every night after." She shuddered. "I didn't want to do it, but Jim insisted. I can't describe my horror and loathing at the sight of the slow change that came over him that night—how before my eyes my brother became a savage beast!"

For a few moments she sat in silence that I did not break.

'He was worst in the week of the full moon,' she began again. 'Then the blood-lust in his veins was strongest, and I had the most difficult time with him. It's the sixth month, now. Up to this time Letellier has appeared only on moonlit nights and howled for Jim just beyond the clearing. Jim says that if he can be shot and killed, the spell will be lifted from him by Letellier's death. I tried once or twice to shoot him, but he avoids me -and I'm not a good shot.

'I came to you, because today Letellier surprized me at the lodge—and threatened me. He knows that Jim is escaping him, and that I'm helping him. If I continue, he means to waylay me either when I go to Lacroit, or when I get water or wood. Before this he never came, though I saw him once by day shortly after he had attacked Jim in his nocturnal form. He was limping. I think my bullet caused that limp. That offers definite proof that bullets can and do affect these creatures. At least, a bullet can kill their bodies—but Jim says that it must be a silver bullet to free the evil spirit that animates Letellier. Will you help me?'

Once more she was on the verge of hysteria.

'You and I will do it together,' I said.

'Thank you,' she said simply.

'I'm going back to Loon Lodge with you at once,' I went on, 'and when I know you're safe inside, I'm going to Lacroit and have silver bullets made.'

Our journey back to Loon Lodge was rapid, for Laramie Shaw was worried about Jim, not knowing how much power Letellier might have over him by day. But Jim was safe. I left at once for Lacroit, warning Laramie under no conditions to leave the house, for since Letellier might have seen me and guessed that she had sought help, he might lie in wait for her at once.

The hour I spent in the village was nerve-racking. I could not help thinking of Laramie's danger, fearing that she might be drawn from the lodge despite my warning. And my fear for her safety was tinged by an entirely different emotion which the first sight of Laramie Shaw had implanted in my mind.



An old locksmith had no difficulty in making the bullets which were to fit into my pistol, the weapon I could use with the greatest degree of accuracy.

November dusk was threatening from the other side of the lake when I made my way along the shore, and already the early moon had risen. I ran, to reach Loon Lodge before night, but my haste was needless; for the sun was still lingering on the horizon when I emerged into the clearing. As I approached the lodge I saw from the corner of one eye that someone was lurking in the bushes beyond, but as I spun around to look, he vanished. At the same moment, Laramie, who had seen me coming, threw open the door and with a glad cry ran out toward me.

I ran to her, took her arm almost roughly, and retreated into the cabin. "Someone in the bushes," I warned.

"I know," she said recklessly, "it's Letellier. He's been here ever since you left for Lacroit."

Jim sat in a low chair near the table. He was even paler than he had been when I had seen him a month before. Indeed, he seemed to be in the last stages of some incurable disease.

"Jim, this is Jack Durfrey. He's got the lodge at the base of the Point. He knows, and he's come to help."

Jim put out a weak, uncertain hand, muttering, "Glad to know you."

As I spoke to him, the sun slipped below the horizon, and abruptly, to my horror, a change came over Jim Shaw. He seemed to shrivel, to shrink back against the chair. His head appeared to lengthen, his hair became coarse, and on his shrinking hands appeared a grayish black mat of hair. His clothes dropped from him. At the same time a wolf howled from the dusk beyond the lodge.

Then I jerked open the door and fired at the skulking figure in the encroaching shadows. I missed, for the wolf that was Letellier vanished into the underbrush.

I heard Laramie's frightened cry behind me and whirled to see Jim, her brother, a wild animal, snarling and unbound, free for the first time. In the excitement of my coming, Laramie had forgotten to bind

him! But, fortunately for both of us, the animal could not throw off the physical weakness of the man, and the wolf was accordingly handicapped. Again came a threatening howl from outside.

I had left the door standing partly open, an act of carelessness for which both Laramie and I might have paid with our souls. It was Laramie's warning cry that saved us. I turned just in time. For the wolf that was Letellier, seeing that Jim was unbound, that the door was open and our backs turned, had run swiftly across the clearing, and was launching itself at me even as I turned. I fired blindly, closing my eyes.

I think no sound was ever more welcome to my ears than the sound of the wolf's body crashing to the earth. With an effort I swung the door to and backed up against it.

I heard Laramie's low cry of joy, and in another moment witnessed the amazing transformation from wolf to man that brought Jim Shaw once more into human shape, a slow, horrible process, suggestive of long-lost, age-old horror.

Then Laramie Shaw sought my arms.

Laramie has since become my wife.

I admit that at first I had had doubts about her sanity, despite the way in which facts as I knew them fitted into her explanation. But all doubts I had were lost when Jim and I stepped from the lodge later that night to bury the thing that lay just beyond the door. For, though I had clearly shot a timber wolf, the thing we buried was the body of the man who called himself Henri Letellier!

## *Death Holds the Post*

URGENT GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE ACTING ON  
ADVICE FROM GERMANY ASKS ALL COMMANDERS  
OF ALGERIAN POSTS TO WATCH FOR AND ARREST  
GERMAN SCIENTIST DR OTTO PRETTWEG WHO ES-  
CAPED FROM SANITARIUM WITH IMPORTANT  
DOCUMENTS STOP BELIEVED HEADING FOR AL-  
GERIA SINCE ALL OTHER AVENUES OF ESCAPE  
STOPPED SEEN ON FRENCH COAST STOP ARREST  
THIS MAN IMMEDIATELY STOP DESCRIBED AS  
TALL THIN MAN SUNKEN CHEEKS LIVID SCAR ON  
LEFT CHEEK BLACK EYES GRAY HAIR URGENT  
RELAY

Eddie Cranston reread the dispatch he had just decoded and handed it to his companion in the stuffy room. "They *would* spring that on us just when we're in a hole about Mechar," he said in irritation.

His companion read the message, grunted perfunctorily, and handed it back without comment. Cranston went out into the deserted quadrangle where buildings and ground alike baked in the mid-afternoon sun. He was unpleasantly aware of the heavy, hot lifelessness of the place. On the wall two guards were limned against the parched blue of the African sky; in the shade of a barracks doorway a native slept; there was no other sign of life. Half a hundred men had marched from Surdez to the post at Mechar two days before. The other half were finding relief from the heat in sleep.

Cranston went into the largest of the several buildings within the white walls of Surdez. Lieutenant Prageur, a big man with a troubled

frown on his forehead, slept on his narrow untidy cot, snoring lightly, his boots on the floor, his blouse and shirt flung over the back of a chair. Cranston touched his superior's shoulder.

"Lieutenant," he said softly.

The officer awoke with a start, swinging his bare feet to the floor "What d'you want? Anything happen?"

"Special dispatch, sir!"

Prageur took the message and read it. He shrugged irritably "We won't have to worry much about that. Even a lunatic wouldn't hide in a god-forsaken hole like this. Now, what about Mechar? Still no contact?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Damned queer business. Those fellows should have been there a long while ago."

"Any orders, sir?"

"Stick at that wire. We can't do anything else."

Cranston left the building, thinking about Mechar. The trouble had started when news came from Mechar that a queer band of unidentified men—marauders, gipsies, Tuaregs, no one knew exactly—were occupying an old and deserted post near Mechar, the last outpost. Before Lieutenant D'Oblier at Mechar could send out an investigating party, the post had been surprized by a formidable army of men and, after a futile battle on the part of the Legionnaires, had been taken. Dispatches to Surdez had ceased in the middle of the sentence announcing Mechar's fall.

Orders had come from headquarters to dispatch fifty men to Mechar at once, and at the same time came the news that more men were being sent to Surdez from adjoining posts. Two days had passed since then, but no word had reached Surdez from Mechar, nor had any intelligence of the fifty men reached the post. Lieutenant Prageur and the remainder of the garrison had come to believe that D'Oblier had been deceived as to the number of men at the deserted post, for only a great number could have destroyed the garrison at Mechar, which, being the last outpost, had many more men than Surdez.

Cranston waited futilely at the telegraph, occasionally tapping out



the code call for Mechar. Silence was his only answer. He slid down in his chair and dozed.

Half an hour later Cranston was shaken out of his sleep by the rough voice of a guard.

"Gasparri's come back," he said.

Cranston was instantly awake. Gasparri was one of the fifty dispatched to Mechar two days ago. "Gasparri!" he echoed "Who else?"

"He's alone Stumbling across the desert as if he were wounded I saw him from a distance He dropped from exhaustion just beyond the gates."

Gasparri lay at the door, stretched on the ground where the guard had put him Cranston bent over the body. Gasparri's face was black with grime and sweat, his lips were cracked, and white with caked dust His chest lifted and fell in heavy, disturbed breathing

"Get him to bed No wait—I'll get him in You go for Lieutenant Prageur."

Cranston carried the unconscious man into the building, where he lowered him carefully to a cot. He sought and found some brandy, which he forced through Gasparri's parched lips. In a few moments the exhausted man's breathing eased up. Cranston was watching Gasparri's face when Prageur entered.

The lieutenant went over to the cot and looked down. He said nothing, but apprehension for the forty-nine men who had not returned was plainly written on his features. The Italian moved restlessly; he was coming around. Cranston and Prageur waited Presently Gasparri opened his eyes. Immediately Cranston was at his side with a glass of water.

"Not too much, now," he said.

Gasparri gulped a few swallows with painful effort and sank back on the cot. His blood-shot eyes stared vacantly at the ceiling His lips moved soundlessly. But in a moment blood flushed in his cheeks, crept back into his gray lips.

"Gasparri!" said Lieutenant Prageur.

Gasparri looked vacantly at him and said, "Not to Mechar!" That was all.

Prageur bent forward. "Where are the others, Gasparri?"

For a long moment Gasparri's face remained expressionless, then a look of unutterable horror crept over his features. His blood shot eyes opened wide, his lips fell apart, his hands fumbled at his neck as if he were stifling. "*Dio!*" he gasped "one of them—one had me by the neck!" Then he began to mutter incoherently

Prageur held back his impatience.

It did not take Gasparri long to pull himself together. After his muttering subsided, he lay for almost a half-hour fully conscious, and at length pulled himself up into a sitting position and began to talk.

He told of the arrival of the fifty at Mechar. They had come to the post in eleven hours, for it was not a great distance from Surdez, and had found it apparently deserted. Yet the gates were locked on the inside. . . .

"We broke in after a while and waited for something to happen. Nothing did. Inside, everything was quiet and deserted. Then we went in. As soon as we were well inside, the firing began, from all sides, from doors and windows and roofs where *they* had been concealed. We answered their fire—but we didn't have a chance against an army like that!"

Gasparri shuddered, horror in his eyes.

"That army," he repeated "*Dio!* it was no army. We shot, we struck home—but not one of them fell." His voice rose abruptly. "They were dead already! Some of them were skeletons, half-rotten corpses, and *Dio!* some were the men from Mechar—dead men, fighting!"

He fell back.

Prageur made a gesture of annoyance. "Sun's got him," he said irritably. "And he sounded all right."

He bent over the Italian, who was crouching back against the bed, covering his eyes with his hands, shuddering violently. "Look here, Gasparri!" he commanded sharply. "Forget that. We sent fifty good men to Mechar. They haven't come back, and we haven't had a word from them! What happened to them? You must know. *Tell me!*"

Gasparri raised his head, dropping his hands listlessly. Then he said, "I have told you, sir. They're dead. They were killed by those dead

things at Mechar. I alone escaped. His voice was heavy and portentous with a calm, deadly hopelessness.

"You're delirious!" snapped Prageur. He sat down on the cot and grasped Gasparri's wrists roughly in a tight grip.

Gasparri made no protest; he only looked at the lieutenant out of fright-haunted eyes.

"Tell me!" Prageur ordered again, but his voice was less sure.

Gasparri repeated, "I have told you, sir. They were killed by dead men, and one who was not dead—a tall, thin old man, who directed their movements from the safety of the watch-tower, and he was like a ghost. But all the others are dead, I tell you, dead—and yet they moved, those dead ones."

"What happened to our men, Gasparri?"

"They're dead in Mechar." Then abruptly Gasparri's eyes flamed with a ghastly fear. "*Or perhaps they, too, are alive like those others.*"

Prageur turned away, shrugging.

Cranston followed him to the door. "He's obviously mad, sir, but that doesn't explain his presence. Why is he here? He came alone on foot across the sand."

Lieutenant Prageur looked at him. "*Sand ae Dieu!*" he exploded. "You don't put any faith in that tale, do you, Cranston?"

"No, sir," replied Cranston promptly. "But I don't understand his condition. He got a shock somewhere, because there's something more than imagination behind that story he's telling."

The whimpering voice of the Italian drifted out to them. "My neck," Gasparri complained, "bones around my neck—rotted flesh—ahhrr. . . ."

Prageur jerked his head in the direction of the cot. "Look after him, and keep on trying to get Mechar," he said. Then he turned on his heel and walked out into the blazing quadrangle.

Cranston saluted smartly and went back into the building.

Gasparri's removal to his own quarters was but a matter of a few moments, and Cranston was soon attempting to contact Mechar, though he felt intuitively that this was hopeless. He had not been long at it when he was brought to his feet by a startled shout from the quad-

rangle. He ran quickly to the door, where he was assailed by a babble of voices and sight of a second guard running toward the lieutenant's quarters.

Someone saw Cranston and shouted, 'Another coming across the sand wearing the uniform. From Mechar.'

"How far out?"

"About a mile."

Lieutenant Prageur, who had heard, was already striding toward the walls. Cranston followed.

From the small turret surmounting the southwest corner of the walls, Prageur scanned the desert through his binoculars. Cranston, looking out, saw for a few moments nothing but a gleaming expanse of sand topped by undulating silver waves of heat, rising and falling into an endless sky, blue as the sea. Then his eyes focussed properly and he saw the oncoming man—a small figure, moving slowly but steadily across the golden expanse of sand.

"I don't recognize him," said the lieutenant doubtfully. "Can't make out his face for his *kepi*. But he's one of our men. Take a look."

As Cranston took the glasses, Prageur stepped out along the wall and shouted down "Ourlet, ride out to meet him."

The glasses brought the man on the sand much closer. It was a white man in a private's uniform. But what instantly caught Cranston's eye was the ease with which the soldier was moving. He was coming in a straight line across the sands, heading obviously for the Surdez gates, never hesitating, never stumbling as a man in exhaustion might, just coming along at a steady though slow and mechanically awkward gait.

"Spot that walk?" asked Lieutenant Prageur.

Cranston nodded. "Funny, sir."

Prageur stood looking out across the sand, his hands moving nervously. "I don't like it," he said suddenly. "But he seems to be one of our men."

The two of them descended the stairs to the quadrangle. The gates had been thrown open, and Ourlet had ridden out to meet the on-



coming Legionnaire. Cranston had the fleeting hope that from this one, at least, they might learn something.

Then abruptly a shot broke the tense stillness. It came from beyond the post, from the sand, from the weapon which had appeared in one hand of the advancing Legionnaire. And the shot had been fired at Ourlet!

It had happened in the space of a few seconds—the walking man suddenly producing a revolver and firing at Ourlet as Ourlet rode up, Ourlet hit, dropping on his horse, wheeling the animal about and riding furiously back toward the gates. Amid a babble of shouting from the men at the gates, a second shot rang out; a moment later Ourlet was safely within the walls.

Someone sprang forward to help him from the horse, while others moved to shut the gates.

"Wait!" ordered Prageur.

He was watching the oncoming figure, and there was a curious intentness in his gaze. But before he could give a further order, the abrupt silence that had fallen was again broken—this time from behind them.

Gasparri, aroused by the outcries and the shots, had come from his quarters and had crept unseen to the gates. Suddenly he began to scream, his horrified eyes fixed upon the figure looming out of the sand waste.

"It's one of those dead ones! *Dio!* We are lost if he gets in!"

At the same moment, Ourlet gasped, "Something queer—he's not one of us." Then he collapsed.

Prageur had stepped forward and was even now bending above Gasparri.

But Gasparri went on, his voice rising. "Lieutenant, sir, it is a dead man. He'll kill all of us, just as he was killed. We can't kill him—he's dead already! *Dio!* Close the gates before it is too late!"

Terror spoke mutely from the sick man's trembling lips, from his haunted eyes. The man from Mechar was less than a hundred feet from the gate now, but he had not once looked up to see what lay ahead of him. There was menace in the way he held on to his weapon.

'Hide, all of you,' Prageur ordered. 'Leave the gates wide. Some of you crouch to the wall. Some get on top and fall on him when he comes in. We'll take him alive!'

The men scrambled to obey, and in a few moments silence had fallen, all the men concealed, Cranston and Prageur close to the gate in order to be among the first to attack. The sand sounded under footsteps, and then the man from Mechar came through the opened gate.

Three Legionnaires who had been lying atop the wall launched themselves downward, one of them striking the intruder and carrying him to the sand with him. At the same moment men rushed at the man from Mechar from behind the gates and along the walls. The weapon he carried sounded only once, then it was wrenched from his grasp and he lay prone, unmoving, his *kepi* tipped off from his head.

It was over.

Then a long sob of horror rose from the men around the fallen Legionnaire, and there was a concerted backward movement. Cranston and Prageur pressed forward and saw. The face that had been hidden beneath the *kepi* was not a face. It was half exposed bone, half greenly rotting flesh! From it rose the odor of decaying flesh. The thing on the sand before them had been shot through the head a long time ago.

'*Mon Dieu*!' breathed Prageur, staring with wide eyes, and abruptly turned away. 'Tie it up and put it away somewhere—oh, bury it!'

Reluctantly, four of the men moved to obey.

Prageur looked uncertainly at Cranston. 'Come along,' he murmured.

He moved to where Gasparri was leaning weakly against the wall, shuddering at the memory this foul invasion had brought to fresh life.

'Come, Gasparri,' said Prageur gently, taking him by the arm and leading the way to his quarters.

'All right,' said Prageur without preliminary, 'I'll grant you that story, Gasparri. Don't ask me what I think about it. I've got nothing to say. I want to ask you something.'

He took a fragment of paper from his desk. Cranston recognized it as the paper upon which he had written the message from headquarters earlier in the day.

Prageur handed it to Gasparri. "Anything in that sound familiar to you?" he asked.

Gasparri took the paper wonderingly and read. Abruptly his expression changed. "*Dio*, yes!" he whispered harshly. 'Tall thin man sunken cheeks livid scar on left cheek gray hair,' he read jerkingly, and looked up. "It's the man—the man who directs those dead ones!"

A mirthless smile appeared on Prageur's lips. "Get that, Cranston. Wire headquarters at once for detailed information on Prettweg and his documents."

Headquarters was vague. Their best was in a short wire that came two hours later.

PRETTWEG DANGEROUS LUNATIC WHO BELIEVES  
IN CERTAIN FORMULAE CONCERNING REANIMA  
TION OF DEAD BODIES STOP ESCAPED SANITARIUM  
AND MADE FOR COAST BELIEVED IN ALGERIA  
SINCE HE HAD TALKED OF GOING TO COUNTRY  
WHERE CONFLICT WAS IN PROGRESS STOP GER  
MAN GOVERNMENT RELUCTANT TO RELAY MORE  
STOP SURETE BELIEVES PRETTWEG IS ON TO SOME  
THING DEVELOPED IN GERMAN LABORATORIES  
HAD ADDED DEVELOPMENTS FROM OWN DIS  
EASED BRAIN STOP TAKE THIS MAN DEAD OR  
ALIVE.

The message gave scant satisfaction to Lieutenant Prageur. He studied it for a few moments in silence, then he dropped the paper with a mutter of impatience.

'Look here,' he said, 'reinforcements are due here almost any hour now, but we'll not wait. Forty of us march on Mechur tonight.'

'Lieutenant, Sir!' protested Gasparri. 'Those men go to something worse than death!'

"Leave that to me, Gasparri," snapped Prageur. "I'll lead them, and I'll lead most of them back here alive unless something goes seriously wrong. I don't think it will. Meanwhile, you keep a tight mouth about what you've told us, the men know that something's hitched up against them, and they're on edge. You, Cranston, let Ellery take the tele

graph, I've got a special use for you. Before you get ready, wire headquarters for three planes. We'll bomb Mechar, if necessary "

"But sir, why sacrifice your men?" asked Gasparri

"There will be little sacrifice " said Prageur "We'll fake an attack. As long as I'm not entirely convinced of what's going on at Mechar, I'm not taking chances either way. We'll lead them to attack us, and then retreat. One of us will have to get into the post, will have to fake death—and that may mean death, I don't know. But that's our only way of finding out what's going on in there, and we'll lose the least men that way."

Gasparri nodded.

"I've picked you for that, Cranston," said Prageur suddenly

For a moment Cranston felt a sick feeling invade him. Then he dispelled it. "Very well, sir," he said.

"You know what it means?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. You're the man. Granting Gasparri's story, your danger is two-fold—the directing genius, Prettweg, may discover that you're not really dead and may have you killed; and you may be trapped in the post when the bombing begins—if it becomes necessary to bomb—All right, get ready. Send that wire for planes; I'll let the men know. Lehmann will be in charge until I come back—if I do."

The red globe of the sun was rising over the rim of the desert when the small troop of forty men sighted Mechar. A slight wind was blowing. Cranston and Prageur walked together at the side of the marching line.

"In case you don't come back?" asked the lieutenant soberly.

"Instructions for the disposal of what I own are in my quarters," replied Cranston curtly.

Prageur nodded. He took a small bottle from his pocket and gave it to Cranston. "Blood drawn just before we left," he said. "Spill it over your uniform and slit the cloth to resemble a bullet-hole. Take no more chance than you have to."

The lieutenant slowed up his men. Through his glasses he isolated a



single figure high on the ramparts of Mechar, keeping carefully out of range.

"Prettweg, all right," he murmured, dropping his glasses "I can make out the scar. Queer-looking devil."

Prageur ordered the men to break file, briefly repeated his earlier orders, spread them out, and ordered an advance. Cranston was well in the lead.

They were perhaps a hundred feet from the walls of Mechar when Prageur ordered them to fire. Prettweg had disappeared, and other figures had taken his place, carelessly exposing themselves to the fire of the Surdez men.

Immediately a volley of lead poured down on Lieutenant Prageur's men. And a second. But that was all, for at once the lieutenant ordered a retreat. Indeed, some of the men had taken flight at the first volley, in accordance with Prageur's previous instructions. Cranston fell at the first volley, thinking fleetingly what supreme irony it would have been had he been shot and killed. Five other men fell with him. It was but the work of a few moments to uncork the bottle of blood and let it soak into his uniform, which he had split previously. Then he pushed the bottle deep into the sand.

From the corner of his eye he saw Prageur looking back; then he and the men were gone, and Cranston lay unmoving. He wondered what would happen now, warning himself not to move a muscle, to breathe shallowly. It seemed to him presently that hours were passing, but in a little while his ears caught the sound of activity behind the walls of the near by post. The sun's heat had become terrific, and his hope that something would happen was intensified. Then he heard the gates of Mechar swing open.

From a carefully opened eye he saw a figure come forth alone, a revolver held menacingly in his hand. It was Doctor Prettweg. The old man was hatless, and his long white hair lent his face an air of benevolence, but nothing concealed the aura of diabolic evil about him: the crimson scar edged in blue and gray, the twisted mouth, the fierce, black eyes, loathsome and gloating. As Cranston watched, the doctor smiled at

sight of the dead men, his pleasure ghoulishly manifest. He turned and made irritable motions to someone beyond the gates.

The first corpse lay at a distance of twenty feet from Cranston. Against his better judgment, he continued to watch the mad doctor's approach. He saw him bend over the corpse, looking only casually at the body. Then Prettweg took a bottle from his pocket, opened it, and forced liquid into the dead man's mouth; he stood then, watching the corpse intently for a few moments, moving away only when he had seen—as Cranston, too, saw—a *faint horrible movement from the dead man!*

Cranston restrained himself with a tremendous effort; he had seen something he knew to be impossible, yet it *was!* Prettweg came on to the second corpse, and Cranston, following him with his eyes, saw that the second Legionnaire was not dead, for he moved feebly at the doctor's approach. Could it be that the first of them had not been dead either?

But what doubts Cranston had were horribly, brutally dispelled; for the doctor, noticing the movement, hesitated, assured himself that the man was in no position to inflict injury, and then callously put a bullet through the Legionnaire's head. Cranston steeled himself to keep from giving voice to his fury and horror.

The bottle again, and once more liquid down a dead throat.

Inside him, Cranston was shuddering with loathing for this inhuman beast. But no emotion rose to the surface. He lay now with his lips fallen apart, his jaw hanging loosely agape, and despite the terrific strain, with his eyes wide and turned up against the sun. He was completely relaxed and motionless, his breathing restrained as much as possible.

Footsteps came toward him. He was aware suddenly of the doctor's hand grasping his neck, of long, clammy fingers touching his skin, and the strain of simulating death became almost unbearable. Then the bottle was at his mouth, and acrid liquid touching his tongue, and Prettweg's grip relaxed. Cranston's head fell against the sand, his one thought that his most difficult first stage was over, for the doctor

had noticed nothing amiss. Cranston let the vile-tasting liquid in his mouth drool out upon the sand.

Prettweg was standing among the dead, his now malign face contemplating the nearest corpse, his hands clasped behind him much in the attitude of a physician in consultation. But his attitude underwent a subtle change—an unholy joy came into the old man's eyes, his mouth upcurved in evil triumph, and it seemed that psychic power flowed from his entire body. He extended his arms in an all-embracing gesture, and his hands beckoned. Now his eyes became hypnotic, his aspect momentarily benign, and in an almost suggestively benign voice, he spoke.

"Come now, my children. Rise and follow me."

If he had not been too concerned about his own safety, Cranston might have given himself away in his terror at what followed Prettweg's gentle words. For the dead began to move, stiffly, mechanically! One by one they rose and stood at attention, their dead faces turned expressionlessly toward the commanding figure whose medicine and mental magic had brought their bodies to ghastly life. Their arms hung limply at their sides, their heads were servilely bent, their eyes sought blankly for the directing force in the tall thin figure before them. Prettweg's gray hair, now ringed around by sunlight, lent him an ironical saintliness.

Cranston was the last to rise.

The doctor swept the six with his glance and looked back toward the fort.

Cranston felt deep within him the wish that the bombing planes might already be here. Let them come! he thought, but there was no sound in the air.

"Come," said Prettweg.

He strode away toward the open gates, and the incredibly animated dead moved after him, Cranston among them; he too, like those others, walking with the automatic precision of somnambulists. He suffered a momentary impulse to shoot the doctor as he walked along with his back to him, but a confused sense of honor, combined with the conviction that he must get inside Mechar as Prageur had ordered, to verify Gasparri's ghastly story, smothered his insane desire. His hands

itched for the feel of his weapon, his entire body craved the maddening, satisfying pleasure of shooting down this inhuman monster who had such terrible power over the dead.

But surely there was already enough verification? Or was it night mare? Cranston was walking at the side of a Surdez Legionnaire, Franz Klast, a German whom he remembered as a good fellow. Cranston had seen him shot, had seen him fall—for an instant he fancied that he labored under a monstrous delusion, a mad dream from which he must shake himself; for Klast could not be dead, since he walked at his side, alive!

"Klast!" he whispered. "For God's sake, talk to me!"

There was no answer.

Cranston turned his head recklessly to the side and looked at Klast, almost recoiling in horror at what he saw: the gaping hole in Klast's temple, torn by the fatal bullet fired by one of the dead from the walls of Mechar. The wound's black maw mocked Cranston.

Klast was walking sightlessly, animated by a ghastly force from beyond his body! A flash of intelligence gave sudden vision to Cranston—this madman Prettweg, controlling thousands upon thousands of dead, could ultimately sweep over the face of the earth, for his soldiers had conquered death, and were in themselves death. Death could sweep over the earth, could hold every fort, every outpost, every great city, could reign over all the country, directed by the cancerous brain of this madman! Far back, perhaps, some remote German scientist had manufactured this acrid elixir of life, but it took modern experimentation and the distorted mind of a madman to complete the frightful dreams of that earlier madman.

Cranston knew that every moment was vital. Prettweg must die, no matter what the cost.

Cranston looked guardedly ahead. Prettweg was just vanishing between the gates of Mechar. There was nothing to do but enter the post, and presently the shambling file of men passed through the gateway. Cranston heard the gates creaking shut behind him.

*Prettueg must die!* The thought drummed through his head. For without the doctor, the elixir was harmless—it needed the directing



genius of this mad brain to complete the animation barely begun by the invention of a man now long forgotten. The font of this psychic power must be wiped out.

Now he stood, trapped within the walls of Mechar, he and a madman alone with a ghastly army of dead men. His companions had ceased to walk; they had stopped in their tracks, bodies wearily sagging. Cranston wondered whether Prettweg had removed that mysterious directing force. For a moment he allowed his lids to shut out the death around him, and strained his ears for the sound of motors humming in the sky.

There was nothing

He looked cautiously around him. The quadrangle was cluttered with half-decayed bodies of living dead men, some of them skeletal remains of Tuaregs whose bodies had long lain exposed to the sun! They stood dumbly against the walls, they sat in doorways or on the sweltering sand, their arms dangling between their legs, they leaned on the ramparts, watching the sky through eyes destined soon to sink in decay into their sockets. And Cranston stood among them, isolated and alone.

Prettweg came suddenly from one of the doorways. He stood before them suddenly, and again Cranston was struck with the false saintliness lent him by the sun in his hair. The mad eyes were glowing again as from some inner vision, and presently the old man's lips parted and he began to speak, his voice slow and gentle, almost crooning, and yet alive with gloating power.

"Tomorrow, my children, we will take Surdez," he said. "There will be enough of us after that to move down the line upon post after post. This will be our country then. And afterward! I dream of what lies before us!"

The madness of him spoke from all his features. Once again Cranston conquered the desire to fire pointblank at the sinister face that seemed to hang in the arid heat of the quadrangle. For a moment Prettweg scanned their dead faces, and now his gaze lingered on Cranston. Could he suspect? Cranston wondered; or had he somehow seen Cranston's reckless movements of a few moments ago? But perhaps more be-

lievable—he had in some way felt the mental force of another living mind! The thought froze Cranston with sudden fear, for surely this perceptive mind must have felt hate flowing toward him!

But Prettweg turned and began to walk away.

Instantly Cranston's fear broke into disorder. He whipped his revolver from its holster. But at the same instant, his dead comrades, galvanized into action by an unuttered command, flung themselves upon him. His revolver cracked, and a spurt of sand fanned into the air to show Cranston how far his bullet had gone from its mark. Then Mechar and Surdez dead were upon him, grappling with him, struggling clumsily for his weapon, and others were pouring toward him from all sides. He felt their rotting arms wrapped about his limbs, felt their decaying fingers and hardness of fleshless bones at his neck.

Revolvers cracked. He felt searing pains in his leg and shoulder, and went down under the mass of nauseating dead things. Still he fought. He had a momentary glimpse of Prettweg looking sardonically on, his mad face now afire with insane hatred, and saw that the doctor had a revolver ready to fire at Cranston's first appearance. With a pain-racking effort, he shifted under the struggling mass of dead, aimed wildly, and fired—once, twice, three times.

Abruptly the struggle ebbed away.

And died.

Cranston lay in the midst of ghastly mound of dead flesh. He felt nausea assailing him, buried his face in his hands, and waited for death. Nothing happened. A moment passed and he looked up, pulling himself from the decaying flesh that pinned him down. He saw bodies fall from the ramparts like stones, saw the living dead in doorways sag and sprawl into the sand, saw the standing dead topple and collapse like empty sacks. And then he saw Doctor Prettweg against the wall of a near-by building sag gently and slide downward to the sand.

He writhed on the ground, shuddered, and died. Like a giant bird he lay, his white coat spread beneath his arms like the too feeble wings of some predatory creature, his long hair fanned away from his head, his arms outspread, his fingers twisted into the hot sand.

Cranston came unsteadily to his feet, his brain awl, the wounds in

his leg and shoulder flaming with pain. It was over. The horror of living dead men had passed with Prettweg's death. Pray God it would never come again!

Abruptly he heard a familiar sound—the steady drone of racing planes. His mind struggled to free itself from the horror of his surroundings. He must escape before the planes got there—but he alone could not open the gates in so short a time.

Then his mind cleared.

He began to run wildly toward the central building. Somewhere there must be the Foreign Legion flag. A glance told him it was no longer on the ramparts, the dead invaders having doubtless removed it. If he could find the flag or, failing to find it, if he could get to the roof and signal them—for they must know he was here. He could be certain they had first stopped at Surdez for instructions from Prageur.

He emerged on the roof to see the planes almost directly above, circling uncertainly about. At the same moment he caught sight of the flag, crumpled carelessly into a corner. He ran and gathered it up in his arms, mounted the highest wall, and there let the flag stream out behind him as he ran along the perilous rampart.

The leading plane banked and another dipped toward him. He had a sickening conviction that machine gun fire would sweep him from the wall, but the plane veered away. They had seen and understood. Cranston jumped to the roof again and saw men from Surdez coming across the dunes beyond the gate. For a moment only he stood there; then he felt again the increasing pain of his wounds and he toppled forward, lost in an unfathomable sea of blackness.

Cranston was back at his telegraph next day when Lieutenant Prageur entered, in his hand a report to be dispatched to headquarters. As he left the room he turned.

"By the way, you may depend upon promotion," he said crisply, smiling. Then he was gone.

With grim lips Cranston tapped out the report to headquarters:

THE GARRISON AT MECHAR WAS WIPED OUT  
BY A SURPRISE ATTACK OF TUAREGS STOP HELD  
FORT AND WIPED OUT FIFTY-FOUR OF OUR MEN

STOP SURPRIZE ATTACK BY REMAINDER OF OUR MEN YESTERDAY TOOK MECHAR STOP TUAREGS FLED STOP DR OTTO PRETTWEG ABOUT WHOM WIRE RECEIVED TWO DAYS AGO WAS KILLED IN ACTION AT MECHAR STOP HAD JOINED AND WAS LEADING TUAREG ATTACK STOP RELAY TO GERMAN AUTHORITIES.

That was all. It did not need Lieutenant Prageur's subsequent words to convince Cranston of the fitness of the message. "You remember how I took Gasparri's story at first Can you imagine how they'd take it at headquarters, Cranston?"



## *Laughter in the Night*

Mr. William Hanley cursed as his machine stuck in the drive that entered the courtyard of the *Antler Inn*. He put the motor into reverse and tried to back out of the deep muddy ruts; the wheels ground in the mud, but the machine did not move. The rain came down in blinding sheets, and despite his strong headlights, Hanley could hardly make out the shape of the inn as it loomed faintly up in the night a hundred yards ahead of him. Nothing to do but run for it, he thought. He pulled up the collar of his coat, put his brief-case under his arm, and ducked out of the machine across the slippery and apparently grassless courtyard to the veranda of the inn.

He pounded loudly on the door, wondering whether the landlord could hear his knock above the sound of the rain beating down, and the howl of the wind. Mr. Hanley was shivering in the cold when the door opened a bit, and a woman looked out. When she saw the man standing there with his coat drawn up around his ears and the rain dripping off the brim of his hat, she opened the door quickly and let him in.

A little puddle of water formed where Mr. Hanley stood just inside the door. He held his dripping hat in his hand and asked for a room.

"I'm sorry," the hostess said, "but we are full up."

Mr. Hanley frowned. "You must have some place where I can stay for the night!"

"Nothing, I'm afraid," she said. Then she added, a little dubiously, "Perhaps you can find lodging at the *Mason House* a few miles up the road?"

"But my car's stuck out there, and it's an awful night to send a man out." Mr Hanley smiled at her, looking very bedraggled in his soaked clothes, almost wistfully he looked across the room to the roaring fireplace.

"We have no room, sir. I'm sorry."

No amount of persuasion could have induced Mr Hanley to leave the *Antler Inn* that night, and the stubborn attitude of the hostess did not shake his determination to stay. Surely there was some place, a little closet or a bench, where he could spend the remainder of the night? No, they were full up, she told him again. But he had to stay somewhere—couldn't think of going out into that rain and wind again. The hostess remained adamant. He could not stay.

But at this point, the host, a large, burly man, appeared from the rear of the inn. He had evidently overheard part of the conversation, for he stepped forward, looking hard at the woman, and said, "We'll give you a room."

For a moment the woman looked as if she had not understood aright; then she turned and faced her husband. "Not *that* room, Peter?"

"That room," said Peter.

"No, no," the woman said, quickly, and would perhaps have gone on to say more, had not Mr. Hanley himself interrupted.

"Look here," he said, "if you have an empty room, I see no reason why it shouldn't be put to use."

The host nodded, and the woman looked at him nervously. "There's only one provision," the host went on. "If we give you the room, you must promise not to raise the shade on the window."

Mr. Hanley looked at the man and woman blankly for a moment. "That's an odd request," he said at last. "Why do you make it?"

A dubious glance passed between the host and his wife. "There is madness beyond that window," said the woman in a low voice.

Mr Hanley frowned and looked at the man.

The host began to speak. "The window opens on what was once a gallows stand. Many highwaymen were hanged there and there's a curious story of a ghoul who disturbed the bodies laid to rest beneath the gallows tree." He coughed. "The last time the room was occupied,

a man lost his mind—he died later, I believe. The room's all right though. I've seen a few things, of course, but there's nothing if you keep the shade down."

"Very well," agreed Mr. Hanley cheerily. Anything to end this, he thought. "My car's outside in the driveway," he added.

The woman nodded, remembering.

The host was turning away when Mr. Hanley spoke again. "By the way, can you tell me how far I am from the estate of Mr. Herbert Altamount?"

The host looked at him, pondering. "About seven miles," he said.

"Seven miles!" exclaimed Mr. Hanley. "Why, I thought . . . that it was much farther than that."

"No, 'tisn't," said the host. "As a matter of fact, this inn was once Altamount Property."

Mr. Hanley was led up the stairs and shown into the room. Alone, he stood for a minute with his back to the door, thinking. "I must have been going in a circle all the time," he murmured, tugging in some perplexity at his mustache. "Confound that rain!"

He looked around him. What a cozy room it was, after all! Instinctively he glanced at the single window, over which hung attractive chintz curtains, behind them was the dull brown of the shade. What nonsense, he thought, not to raise the shade! He gave his attention finally to unpacking his things.

He finished at last and took up a book to read. He wondered, as he sat down, whether they had put his motor in shelter. And more important, whether it was possible for any one to find him; the rain, he felt sure, would wipe out all traces.

He had just started to read when there came a knock on his door, and a moment after, the host's face, now remarkably timid, peered in at him.

"I'm sorry," he began apologetically, "but I didn't want you to think that there was anything about my story not quite right."

"Oh," said Mr. Hanley coldly.

"You see, there really was a ghoul. They hanged him on the gallows tree, he was the last to die there. They say he went mad at the last, and

they couldn't stop him laughing at them. Only the rope choked him off. Now, sometimes, if you lift the shade—he comes back. He isn't a pleasant sight, but he'll not do you any harm. But sometimes he brings something about, somehow his laughter kills people. But that's only when they've done something wrong."

Mr. Hanley started suddenly, looking sharply at his host. "What do you mean?" he asked curtly.

"Well," the host coughed a little, "last year we found a tenant dead here. We'd warned him, but he wouldn't listen, and later on we'd found he was a man who'd undergone trial for murder but got out of every thing by a clever trick. Another time it was an escaped convict, a murderer. Both of them were distant relatives of old Mr. Altamount over yonder." He coughed again. "As a matter of fact," he went on, "there's a queer story connected with the appearance of this ghoul."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Hanley. He had begun, inexplicably, to feel nervous. Did the host suspect anything? he wondered.

"The last man hanged, the ghoul, they said, was the last of the old Altamount line. It is still said hereabouts that he was innocent, that he was wrongly convicted, and sent to the gallows by the present Mr. Altamount and his relatives, because they wanted his lands and wealth. And it is true that they got all he had, after they had sworn that he had been robbing the graveyards hereabouts. Just before he went to the gallows, the condemned man swore that from that time on the Altamount family would decline, and that it would come to an end with this generation. And it is strange that so many of them have died. It is said, too, that the condemned man swore that many would turn to crime, and two of them have done so, and even now they say that Mr. Herbert Altamount and his London cousin, the only one left, are mixed up in some pretty bad business—swindling, they call it."

"Well, the ghoul seems to have prophesied correctly, doesn't he?" Mr. Hanley assumed a bravado he did not feel.

"That he does. The last thing he said is not likely to come true, in my belief."

"And that?"



"He promised to come back and haunt the gallows tree until he had strangled the last of the new Altamount line. And since the ghost of that poor man won't move from here, I think Mr Herbert Altamount is quite safe."

Mr. William Hanley wanted to say, "But Mr. Altamount is not the last of the line," but instead, he said, "Have you actually seen the ghost-ghoul?"

The host nodded slowly, and spoke reluctantly. "I've seen something I wouldn't say what. But, yes, I think I've seen him." The man looked at Mr Hanley helplessly. "You won't raise the shade?"

"No."

Mr Hanley shook his head. The host bowed and withdrew. Immediately Mr. Hanley's eyes rested on the lowered shade. The devil take the man! he thought. If I want to raise that shade, I shall. Then he turned back to his book and started to read. He had begun again to feel nervous. Perhaps there was something in that story. If you had done wrong? How would the spectre know? Mr. Hanley chuckled grimly. 'I shall have to be very careful,' he muttered, one eye on the shade. There came to bother him with peculiar insistency the vague memory of an Altamount, and a cousin, both of whom had met their deaths in a mysterious fashion at an inn near the old estate.

He had read seven pages, and all the time he was reading he kept thinking about the drawn shade, so that at last, when he started on the eighth page, he went over and raised it. Then he was that the moon had come out, and the wet countryside glistened in the pale light. He hesitated for a moment, looking out. Then he went swiftly to his brief-case opened it a little, and looked in. Those things were safe, at any rate. He *was* beginning to feel a little shaky. Looking at the papers in his brief-case, he wondered whether after all if it would not be better to burn them. But abruptly he gave up the idea. He drew his chair over to the window and sat there, then he turned to his book once more.

He had got a quarter of the way through the book, which was a thin volume, when he found himself looking attentively out of the window. He had seen out of the corner of his eye some furtive movement in the

ghostly moonlight below, and now his ears caught the sound of low chuckling. He put the book aside and pressed his face to the pane; then he silently opened the window and leaned out.

Yes, there was certainly a man prowling about below. Could it be the landlord? No, thought Mr. Hanley, for the fellow was creeping about too secretly for that. He fixed his eyes on the skulking shadow and watched, fascinated. The man was creeping forward in a straight line of shadow. But there should be no shadow, there, reflected Mr. Hanley—unless. He looked up abruptly, and there, reaching up into the sky, barren, lifeless, he saw a gallows tree. He sat struck with the suddenness of the thing—he had thought the tree had been taken down, but perhaps he had misunderstood. How could these people leave the thing standing there?

The creeping figure had come to the foot of the gallows tree now, and it turned its face suddenly and looked up into the moonlight. Mr. Hanley jerked sharply back at sight of it—his heart was beating uncontrollably. The face below him looked suddenly familiar to him—it looked like the face of Herbert Altamount. He felt the blood throbbing in his veins, and his collar seemed suffocating. He ran his finger uneasily along his collar, caressing his neck. He thought abruptly, Suppose Altamount *had* recognized him? And, worse, suppose Altamount had been struck too hard; perhaps he had . . . not recovered? Mr. Hanley brushed the thought away quickly; his hands were trembling as he put them once more on the sill of the window and bent to look out once again.

Then, as he looked down, Mr. Hanley saw that the creature below was looking squarely at him; even as Mr. Hanley watched, the thing in the shadow of the gallows tree began to move closer to the wall. Abruptly Mr. Hanley fell back with a strangled cry; *the thing was coming up!* He leaped backward, but before he could turn, the sound of mounting laughter reached him, and a shadow launched itself at him through the night.

To the man and woman in the kitchen below, there came the sudden sound of terrible laughter. The woman stood rooted; she looked at the man. Then together they ran up the stairs, and in terror they knocked on

the door of Mr. Hanley's room. There was no answer; so they tried the door, and it moved. Abruptly the laughter stopped. The door fell open wide, and they saw Mr. Hanley.

He was huddled in the chair by the window, his head thrown back over the heavy arm of the chair, as if he had jerked himself from the window with terrible force. His face was twisted and contorted into the utmost horror, and the veins in his forehead stood out like great cords. His face was discolored. The mouth was wide, wrenched open, gasping for air. On his neck there were strangely darkening marks—as if he had been strangled! Then, as they stood there, Mr. Hanley's brief case seemed to slide of itself off the bed, papers scattering from it, and for a moment a shadow crossed the moonlight entering at the window; then it was gone.

The woman and her husband backed quietly out of the room and ran hastily down the stairs, where they stood cowering in the hall.

"I told you," whimpered the woman. "I told you."

"Do you think he . . . saw?" asked the man.

Then, suddenly, before the woman could answer, there broke out from above, the utter cosmic sound of uncontrollable laughter!

"Oh! Oh!" whispered the woman in a terror-struck voice. She choked in her throat and leaned heavily on the man. "He was dead. *Dead!*" The laughter stopped as suddenly as it began.

There was an abrupt pounding on the front door. Neither the host nor his wife moved. The pounding was repeated, and then the man latched forward, moving awkwardly. The woman came after him, slowly, terror-stricken.

The door opened and a constable stood there, behind him the host could see other figures.

"Are you the proprietor?" asked the constable.

The man nodded.

"We have traced a man here, a short dark haired man, with a little black mustache. His name is Hanley, William Hanley."

"Upstairs," said the host, waving his head vaguely back toward the stairs. He wanted to say, "But he's dead," but the words stuck in his throat.

"I'm sorry," said the constable, "but I have a warrant for his arrest for the murder of his cousin, Mr. Herbert Altamount, and the theft of some incriminating papers." He stepped forward briskly, looking inquiringly from the man to the woman. Addressing the man, he said, "Will you please lead the way?"



## *The Vengeance of Aï*

When Margaret Levering left me in London, she said, "There is something that can't wait out there, Peter."

I know that whatever she implied had to do with her father, then four months dead, but Margaret would tell me nothing more. She went on to Cairo alone, as she wished. But when six weeks passed, with only two brief and strained notes from her, I knew something was wrong, and followed her.

At the Hotel Continental in Cairo late one afternoon in October, I had barely finished bathing when a boy appeared with a sealed note for me, although I had informed no one of my arrival. I ripped it open and read:

Dear Mr. Harris:

I understand you have just come from London, and I assume you are led here by your interest in the welfare of Margaret Levering, the now Lady Warrender, who is in Cairo at the Hotel Memphis, and who has more than once spoken of you. Please be so good as not to refer in any way to her father, the late Lord Warrender, nor to his recent excavations and unfortunate death in the Valley of the Moon.

I should be glad to talk this unusual request over with you, as between mutual friends of Lady Warrender, if you should so desire. May I respectfully urge you to see me before you see Lady Warrender? You will find me in Room 77 of this hotel. Ask for

Ernest Lumsden.

Ernest Lumsden? I had never heard of him

*Be so good as not to refer in any way to her father, he had written.* Why not? Margaret was perfectly aware of her father's excavations, and knew almost as much of archeology, anthropology, and Egyptology, as he had known himself. Why make no mention of something that had been headlined in every newspaper and journal in the English speaking world?

Lord Warrender had been crushed to death by a falling statue in the temple-tomb of Ai, Goddess of the Moon. I remembered again in my hotel room how bravely Margaret had taken his death. They were adventurers, those two, and the true adventurer is always ready to meet what Providence may have in store for him.

I knocked loudly at number 77.

The door opened almost immediately, and I found myself confronted by an elderly gentleman, whose not unkind face was lined with wrinkles. His hair was sparse and white, yet he could not have been much over fifty.

"May I see Mr. Lumsden?" I inquired.

"I am Mr. Lumsden. Come in."

"Thank you." I walked past him into the room.

When he had closed the door again, he turned to me. "Peter Harris?" he asked.

I nodded curtly.

"It was good of you to come." He turned slightly and indicated a youngish man whom I had not noticed before. "Allow me to present the Sheikh Al-Jubal, Mr. Peter Harris." The Egyptian wore a white drill suit and carried a cane; except for the turban binding his swarthy head, he might easily have been mistaken for an Englishman browned by the hot African sun. The Sheikh Al-Jubal bowed.

I turned to Lumsden again. "I confess that I found your note surprising," I said. "May I know its meaning?"

"Lord Warrender was my best friend," Lumsden began quietly, his eyes steadily on me. "Had I so much as set foot in London in the past twenty years, you would no doubt have known of me before this. As a dear friend of her late father, I am naturally interested in Lady Warrender."

I nodded

"The Sheikh Al-Jabal," he went on, indicating once more the silent Egyptian, "also knew her father well. His intimate acquaintance with the history and present state of the Valley of the Moon proved invaluable to Lord Warrender in his work here. During an acquaintance that was at first a matter of convenience, these two came to regard each other with deep respect and friendship." He paused "I hope you can see, Harris, that in us you have two friends, interested only in Lady Warrender's welfare."

The old man's manner and speech convinced me of his integrity. "I appreciate that," I said.

"Good," he said, nodding abruptly. "Do you know the history of the tombs in the Valley of the Moon?" he asked

I'm afraid I don't. My knowledge of Egyptology is practically nil, and in these more unusual matters, I confess I know nothing at all."

Lumsden turned to the Sheikh "Tell him, Al Jubal."

The Sheikh addressed me for the first time since our introduction. I looked at this dark man with the heavy black beard, the beetling brows, the thin lips. He spoke in a low, pleasant voice

"Aï, the Moon Goddess, is not Egyptian, yet she is the goddess of that accursed valley, worshipped and revered by many of our natives even today."

He paused, as if searching for a point at which to begin, and presently went on.

"Long years ago, a wealthy Chaldean merchant left his native land for Egypt. He came personally to barter his finest wares with Egypt's princes, and his stay was climaxed by his fortunate marriage to an Egyptian lady of quality.

"The family founded by that marriage was one of the richest and most influential during that whole period, and the wealthy merchant found Egypt so to his liking that he made his home here, as many others have done since. When he died, the question of burial arose. Despite his family and his importance, he was not Egyptian. He desired burial under the protection of his own gods.

"So, a tomb was built in what has since been called the Valley of

the Moon. There his mummy was laid And though he was the only foreigner in that resting place, Aï, Chaldean Goddess of the Moon, continues as the protecting deity of the valley and of the people buried there.

"In the innermost chamber of that first tomb in the valley there is a colossal statue of Aï. Around her neck is suspended a giant pectoral of gold, an eight-rayed disk, symbol of the divine power of Aï. These facts were brought to light by Lord Warrender. His labor had brought him to this inner chamber, and it was there that his work was so unfortunately cut short."

The Egyptian ceased abruptly and settled back.

"Was it that statue that crushed him?" I asked.

Lumsden nodded. "Yes, it was the great statue of Aï that toppled from its base and killed Lord Warrender in its fall. The accident occurred when he attempted to remove the golden amulet from the neck of the colossus."

"Isn't it odd that a statue of that size should topple?" I asked.

"No one thought of that until the Sheikh and I got to looking into the matter," said Lumsden. "Lord Warrender had spoken of the statue to us, pointing out that it was attached very firmly to its base. So firmly, indeed, that he made much of the fact that it would be extremely difficult to do anything with it. Yet, the next day it fell, crushing him."

"Could Lord Warrender have been deceived? Perhaps it only seemed firmly attached?" I ventured.

Lumsden shrugged his shoulders, but the look on his face showed his scorn for my suggestion that Lord Warrender might have been in error.

"Perhaps you will think that we too were deceived when the Sheikh and I found the statue of Aï restored to its base when we visited the tomb after Warrender's burial!"

Before I could reply, the Sheikh Al-Jubal cut in suddenly, "There were other things. Do not forget them, Lumsden. Mr. Harris perhaps thinks that worshipping natives crept into the temple-tomb at night and righted the statue."

Lumsden spread his hands. "Yes," he said, "perhaps he does." As a



matter of fact, that was exactly what I had been thinking. But Lumsden went on:

'I'd almost forgotten —there were other things. The terror of the natives when they saw the statue of Aï and the eight-rayed moon-disk, and their subsequent flight. They were afraid of something—screamed out something about a curse, and went positively frantic when Lord Warrender suggested removing the amulet from about the neck of the statue.

'When Lord Warrender went down into the crypt to take the amulet, only two white aides were with him. The natives would not go near the tomb, nor can any of them be induced to enter the tomb even now. Only the two white men saw the statue topple and fall just as Lord Warrender was about to remove the golden disk —and since then, one of those two men has died a mysterious and unaccountable death!'

"What are you implying?" I asked.

The Sheikh Al Jubal interposed. 'It is not a time to beat about the bush," he said. 'The matter is clear for those who wish to see. The desecrator of Ai's temple-tomb is cursed; nothing can save him from death.'

I smiled half-heartedly, with an insolent superiority which I did not quite feel. "Am I expected to take this seriously?" I asked.

Al-Jubal frowned impatiently, and Lumsden looked irritated. Then the Sheikh spoke again, with a scornful gesture in my direction.

"Perhaps Mr. Harris will consider more seriously the as yet unexplained death of Lord Warrender's successor, Herbert Lanseer? He was found just outside the temple-tomb of Aï. He seemed to have been beaten or crushed to death. There were strange marks—the marks of the guardians of Ai, those invisible spirits who have been set to guard the Valley of the Moon and those sleeping there."

Again I felt uneasy. If it was this sort of nonsense. . . .

'Well what has all this got to do with Lady Warrender?' I demanded.

'Everything in the world," said Lumsden quietly. "Lady Warrender is somewhat less skeptical than you."

I was astounded. "Do you mean to say that Margaret, scientist that

she is, actually believes her father to have been killed by the vengeance of Aï—and that other man, Lanseer, I think you called him?"

Lumsden looked away, sighing gently. "Yes," he said, "she believes that—and more. She believes much more. There is another native belief which might interest you."

"And that?" I asked, finding it somewhat difficult to keep the scorn I felt from my voice.

The Sheikh spoke again. "As Aï cursed her father's life, so has Ai cursed his death. As she avenged herself on his body, so she still avenges herself on his invisible soul. She has condemned his spirit by the power of her curse to run always with the guardians of the valley when they go from tomb to tomb on the night of the full moon. Sometimes, Mr. Harris, *they have been seen!*"

"Have you seen them?" I asked sharply.

"No," said Lumsden at once, "but it is not always necessary to see."

I came to my feet. I took my hat from the table. "Thank you," I said, "for your kind intentions. But this sounds like pretty tall stuff to me. I'm sorry." I walked toward the door.

But before I reached it, the door swung open, and a native garbed in conventional English clothes burst into the room. Something had happened that concerned the two men to whom I had been speaking, for both stared at the stranger with apprehensive faces. After a quick glance at me, he addressed Lumsden and the Sheikh.

"Lattal has been found. Near the tomb, where you thought. His head is beaten in—like the others—Lanseer and Weatherbee."

Lumsden and the Sheikh looked at me. I felt my confident superiority crumbling. I turned from the door, looking from Lumsden to the Sheikh. "Who is Lattal?" I asked, but already a premonition was forming in my mind.

"Lattal," said Lumsden, "was the other of the two men who saw the statue crush Lord Warrender. Weatherbee was the first. Both of them left their hotel at dead of night, without a word to anyone. Lattal went as if in a daze—as if some power outside himself was drawing him away from the city. Is it asking too much of you to believe that Lattal's

death is linked to the other three by the power of Aï's curse? Or do you think these deaths a series of remarkable coincidences, Mr Harris?"

It was with a confidence I was far from feeling that I hedged "Stranger coincidences have happened " I turned to the door again with an effort.

Lumsden was there before me "Listen, Harris," he said, not unkindly, "I know how difficult belief must be for you. I understand your attitude. But remember Margaret. You don't realize the nervous condition this has brought her to Go to her if you must, but do not mention her father. If she chooses to bring him up herself there is nothing to be done about it We're trying to keep her mind off it. We're urging her to go back to London. You've got to help."

I put out my hand and took his "There's nothing I'd like better than to see Lady Warrender back in London," I said "Nothing. You may count on me—but as for this supernatural business, that's out, absolutely."

"I understand But Margaret will not return until she is convinced that her father's spirit is not bound to run with the guardians of the temple-tomb of Aï."

"Then you yourself do not believe?" I asked quickly

"You misunderstand me, Harris I do," he replied quietly "But the important thing is to convince Margaret that the legend is untrue"

He bowed slightly, and opened the door The Sheikh Al-Jubal raised his hand in a farewell gesture I heard Lumsden sigh as I walked past him into the hall.

I went out into the bright streets of Cairo heading for the Hotel Memphis and Margaret I admit that my confidence was severely shaken, something I had not cared to show Lumsden and the Sheikh Yet I could not wholly believe in a mythical curse Nor could I believe that Margaret, so sure of herself and her science—Margaret, so serene, so rational and urbane could credit the existence of such a curse. I brushed the suggestion aside, looking forward to seeing her again, and thought that by Christmas we could be married

I looked for Margaret on the green terrace of the Hotel Memphis.

In a moment I saw her, sitting alone by a table just under the wall. Her face was pressed into her hands, and her attitude was strangely dejected. I walked quickly to where she sat and stopped beside her. She was not aware of me until I said, "Hello."

Then she lifted her head slowly and looked up at me. She smiled, and came to her feet. "Peter, you surprised me," she cried, but her voice was listless.

"Is that your only welcome?" I asked, gently chiding.

"I'm glad you came, Peter, so glad I need you!" For a moment there was intensity in her voice, and an unusual emphasis. Perhaps Lumsden had been right, after all.

"I've come to take you back to London," I said, watching her closely, hopefully.

She looked at me, her face expressionless. "I don't know when I can go back."

I watched her face. Under her large hat I saw her heavily shadowed eyes, the line of strain across her forehead, the frightened expression of her lips. "There's something wrong with you, my dear," I said. "Can't you tell me what it is?"

For a time she said nothing. Yes, I thought, Lumsden was right. She is going to tell about it now. I had the uneasy belief that she was going to reiterate everything Lumsden and the Sheikh Al-Jubal had already told me.

"You remember Asid, my father's servant, who stayed here in Cairo after his death?"

I nodded.

"He was very dear to us. He had always been utterly faithful, scrupulously honest. About a week before I left London, I had a letter from him. In it he said that there were strange things happening about the tomb of Aï in the Valley of the Moon. There were stories of weird, ghostly figures, running each night the moon rose full; Asid had seen them, he wrote. *And one of them was my father!*"

She trembled a little.

"At first I didn't believe it. But it worked on me, it grew on me. The idea of the spirit of my father haunting the Valley of the Moon together



with the native guardian spirits became so terrible that I had to come, and I will not return to London until I have seen with my own eyes that my father is not there."

I said, "You don't believe that, Margaret."

She looked at me. "I don't know," she said. "There are strange things here in Egypt, stories of weird, unbelievable curses."

I brushed this aside, impatiently. She broke into speech again.

"On the night of the last full moon, I went out there with Asid. He insisted that I come. An old friend of my father's went along, Ernest Lumsden. I went because I wanted to prove to him that there was nothing, could be nothing. Mr. Lumsden did not want me to go. But I went. I don't know what it was I saw. I think it was my father. There was something, yes. But perhaps it was because of Asid believing in it so strongly. We stood a little way from the tomb of Aï. Suddenly, he clutched my wrist in his hand, pressed it hard in his excitement, and said, 'There! Do you see them, Lady, running, running.' And I thought I did—naked natives, and my father, dressed as he was when he died."

Peter. I've got to see it through. Tomorrow is another full moon. I'm going out there again, without Asid. This time I'll make sure. Tomorrow morning, early. Ernest Lumsden and the Sheikh Al Jubal are going, too. And I want you to come. I need you with me."

"And if there is nothing?" I said. "Will you go back to London with me?"

She nodded.

I imagine that our cavalcade, starting slowly out of Cairo before dawn the next morning, would have seemed an ordinary tourist's expedition to the casual observer. He would have seen a lady and three men, the lady's maid, and two guides.

Our horses took us out of the gray city and into the shadowed desert. Lumsden went ahead with a motor-lorry carrying a searchlight and tenting equipment. We hoped to reach the Valley of the Moon before the hottest part of the day, though it was a good seventy miles out of Cairo. In the desert, with Cairo already disappearing under the dunes

behind us, the first glimmerings of dawn breaking in the sky, our purpose seemed vague and faraway to me.

Once at the Valley of the Moon, the guides helped us throw up the tents. Water was drawn under the palms that sheltered the tombs, and rugs were spread. Then, with the guides on guard, the rest of us retired to the shelter of our tents, and there we rested until the sun had set that night. In the shadowy evening we ate a light supper, and the guides prepared rugs before the tents for the watch. A camp chair was put in place for Margaret to rest on.

The sudden night of the desert came down with startling abruptness. Our camp was enshrouded in blackness, with the dying campfire flickering near the tents. Sitting there, I heard the Sheikh Al-Jubal call to Lumsden, "Is the searchlight in order?"

Lumsden called back, "Yes. I'll take care of it."

I began to wonder why a searchlight had been brought, but my thoughts were diverted by the faint yellow light that came suddenly into being above the edge of the desert, and then the rim of the round moon began its slow climb over the horizon. We waited tensely, saying little, watching for the moment when the moon would be wholly above the sand, when the faint reddish glow would strike the entrance to the great tomb of Ai. Margaret strained forward, her eyes fixed on the now hazily lighted row of tombs. There was not a sound in the night. I felt uneasy.

"Are you all right, dear?" I whispered.

She did not turn, but I felt her hand on mine. She nodded quickly, not wanting to speak. Then suddenly she started forward. "Listen!" she murmured, tensely. The moon had topped the desert. I looked into her face.

At that moment the Sheikh shouted. "The light, Lumsden! The light!" And before Margaret's eyes were focused on the tomb of Ai again, the great white light was trained there, moving slowly across the face of the tomb, then away down the line of tombs in the Valley of the Moon. A sudden wind had come up, a rushing sound in the night. Slowly the ray moved from the tomb to tomb. Margaret, leaning forward tensely watching its path. But there was nothing living in

its light. Back came the ray again to the great tomb of Aï, and once more it described a circle. There was nothing, and the sudden strange wind died as suddenly as it came.

Margaret fell back in her chair "Nothing" she murmured. "Peter, there was nothing."

"Of course not," I exulted. "Of course not."

"It was Asid, wishing so intensely to believe in his native legends," she went on. She turned radiant eyes on me "We'll start for England this week, tomorrow!"

We turned in, to get what sleep we could before our early trek back. But I could not sleep. I lay for what seemed a long time awake in the stillness. And then abruptly I heard the sound of hushed voices and the peculiar padding of feet in the sand. I rose on my elbow and listened. Then I crept stealthily to the opening in the tent and peered out. Lumsden and the Sheikh were walking rapidly toward the tomb of Aï. In a moment I was out of the tent and had joined them.

I assumed readily enough that these two were likewise unable to sleep. I wanted to jibe at them for their belief in the legend which I had seen disproved, yet I could not come directly out and speak.

"Tell me," I asked, after whispered greetings had been exchanged, "why did you move that searchlight so slowly?"

"It was necessary for me to approximate the speed of running men," replied Lumsden without a moment's hesitation. "I had to keep them in the blinding light, so that she wouldn't see."

"Good God, Lumsden, don't tell me you still believe"

Both he and the Sheikh smiled gently. Together we came to a stop. Lumsden's stick was pointing downward, and both Lumsden and Al Jubal were looking at the sand. We were standing just outside the great tomb of Aï.

I looked down. There, in the sand I knew unmolested by wind, for there had been very little wind all that night, were little pits, as if many feet had been running there. Then a cry escaped me.

Before me, in the center of that running line, I saw a single track, a deeper track, a track that showed clear and distinct on the wetish sand under the overhanging palm trees—the track of feet wearing shoes!

Even as I looked, the Sheikh Al-Jubal began methodically to scuff away the traces, following the wide circle, while Lumsden went back along the trail. All my cocksure confidence had left me. I understood that these two were obliterating this definite proof of the curse of Aï so that Margaret might not see in the morning.

Lumsden turned to me. "The first part of the task I have set for myself is finished, Harris. Margaret will return to London now—and you must go with her. Before I leave the Valley of the Moon in the morning, I am going to try and break the curse that binds Warrender's spirit to the tomb of Aï."

"Then I will help you," I said rashly.

A quick glance flashed between the Sheikh and Lumsden. I detected approval in the Sheikh's eyes, and felt strengthened in my resolve. Lumsden did not protest, and in consequence I witnessed a phenomenon which has immeasurably strengthened my belief in the powers of light and darkness.

Lumsden and the Sheikh had come prepared.

A large circle was first drawn in the sand a short distance away from the temple-tomb of Aï, and both Lumsden and the Sheikh stepped within. But when I made as if to follow them, they waved me back.

"You can help best, Harris, by mounting guard over Lady Warrender's tent," said Lumsden. "You will be able to watch quite clearly, and should anything approach the tent, you will be there."

I did not argue, but returned at once to the tent. Nevertheless, I went back with a sharp feeling of disappointment. I took my stand near the opening of Margaret's tent, and watched the strange ceremony that took place within the circle the Sheikh had drawn in the sand.

It was the Sheikh who began the ceremony, murmuring a cryptic incantation in his native language. Presently the great door of the tomb of Aï began to glow, a weird, reddish fire seeming to spread over it, outlining it.

Then suddenly, a group of strange, lifeless figures began to drift from the closed door—naked natives padding automatically outward toward the circle occupied by Lumsden and Al-Jubal. They moved



toward the circle, white and ghostly, stretching out their arms toward the two who sat there, yet unable to break into the circle.

They passed around it, billowing forward and back like a wave, a silent sea of ghastly horror. A feeling of terror crept into me; I dared not think what might happen should these figures from the tomb turn toward Margaret's tent.

My attention was attracted to the tomb, for from it emerged a single figure, white and still—Lord Warrender. His diaphanous shape was clear and distinct. His rugged face was drawn tight, emotionless. He came forward slowly toward the circle. I glanced hastily toward the Sheikh and Lumsden. They were leaning excitedly forward, and Lumsden had moved to the very edge of the circle, obviously to the hands stretched out toward him, held back only by the invisible wall created in some manner by the strange magic known to the Sheikh.

The shadowy Lord Warrender approached the circle, and as he arrived at its outer edge, the Sheikh rose up, and thundered forth a sentence that scattered the native spirits reaching toward the two in the circle. At that moment, Lumsden broke the circle and Lord Warrender's vague form drifted through. At once Lumsden closed the circle again.

Then a strange thing happened. The ghostly shadow of Lord Warrender began to collapse, sinking into the ground.

Only when it had completely disappeared did the Sheikh turn his attention again to the guardian spirits of the tomb of Ai. He began now to drive them back into the tomb. They fought silently to reach beyond the circle, then gradually their ghastly intent weakened, they turned reluctantly, and shuffled in weird procession back to the tomb, through the door of which they returned as they had come. The glow began to fade away from the tomb, and in a few moments the Sheikh and Lumsden left the circle and came wearily over to me. I went forward to meet them.

"He will run no more Harris," said Lumsden. Then he looked gently at the tent which hid Margaret from us, shook his head a little, and said, "Take care of her, and get her away at once in the morning. I don't want her here, if anything should happen. It is not always easy to break a curse, and sometimes there is a penalty."

I disregarded his enigmatic words then. But a month later a letter came from Lumsden. It was a letter of farewell. He wrote at some length, rambling on for pages, but the point of his letter lay in his last pathetic paragraph:

Al-Jubal was found today—near the tomb. He went from the hotel in the night—like the others—drawn by a power we are unable to combat. Soon I must go, too. I have been given a short period of grace, I feel—but the end is in sight. I told you that it is not easy for mere man to break an ancient curse as we did that night on the desert—and I foresaw what might happen. That is why I did not let you come into the circle with us—so that the vengeance of Aï might not pursue you as it must pursue me—soon. We must pay with our lives for breaking the curse of Aï. Good-by.

The letter I sent in answer was returned marked 'Cannot be found.' Inquiries I set on foot brought forward little. Ernest Lumsden had been seen walking from his hotel one night shortly after twelve. That was the last seen of him. Yet I know what happened. I have spared Margaret, now my wife, this knowledge, and hope that no hint of the fate of Lumsden and the Sheikh Al Jubal ever reaches her. I do not think it will.

## *Red Hands*

The two men pulled their small launch up on the sandy beach of Churda, three miles off the Indian mainland. Bill Karney, the big one with a build like a pugilist and a face scarred and pock marked, looked at his partner and ran his greasy hand across his perspiring face.

"We oughta get it all over in one haul, Jerry," he said.

The other nodded. He was a small man, lightly built, with a smooth face that gave an appearance of shrewdness lacking in Karney's. When the boat was well up on the beach, the two of them started across the sand toward the tangled edge of the jungle near by.

"An' remember I gets three quarters for bumping Weber off," said Karney, looking hard at the other.

Jerry Martin said nothing; there was no expression on his face. But he was thinking, You'll not get three-quarters if I can help it, Karney!

"That wasn't no easy job, you know, Jerry," the big one went on, half apologetically for taking more than his partner would get, half convincing himself that it was not mere greed that provoked his desire for three times Jerry Martin's share.

Jerry Martin was half smiling, thinking, You lumbering idiot, who do you think is the brains of this outfit? Where'd you be without me?

They broke through the dense wall of underbrush and foliage into the jungle and the interior of the island.

Jerry hesitated. "You go ahead, Bill," he said. "You know the way—I don't. It's at the end of this trail, ain't it, Bill?"

Bill Karney, obediently taking the lead, nodded. "Yeah, but it ain't much of a trail."

Jerry Martin found himself now in an environment such as he had never known before. While his experiences in India and the African tropics were in no sense limited, he had never seen vegetation so dense and unusual. Here were trees with leaves like tremendous fans and trunks and limbs like great hairy arms, exotic flowers more beautiful than he had ever dreamed existed. Birds of brilliant plumage swept gracefully and skilfully through the dense forest, calling out in raucous cries to the intruders on this seldom-visited jungle island.

Bill Karney plunged carelessly through the brush, and Jerry followed as best he could. The heat was stifling. It was as if there were great furnaces under the earth, as if the thick leaves of the tropical trees held all the heat close to the ground, not letting it escape into the pale blue sky above. The thick perfume of the flowers and the heavy odor of low swamp regions filled the place with an almost unbearable stench.

"God it's hot!" Karney muttered.

"Hellish hot," said Jerry.

They stopped to rest. Jerry leaned against a tree and lit a cigarette. Karney sat down, his back braced against a trunk, his legs flung out into the trail.

"How'd you get Weber, Bill?" asked Jerry abruptly.

Bill Karney shrugged. "Followed him up this trail, watched him plant the stuff, and shot him. He fell near the box. I came back. Nobody's been along the trail since then. Nobody's been on the island even."

"Hope not."

Karney seemed uneasy under Jerry Martin's inquisitive stare. "Something bothering you, Bill?" asked Jerry.

"I won't forget Weber—when I got him," said Karney. A grimace of distaste went over his hardened face. "It was awful, Jerry."

Jerry Martin grunted. "What d'you mean?"

"He fell down in the mud, then he got up on his knees and let out an awful bellow. He saw me standing there, holding the smoking gun. He began to yell at me—'Come on and get it, Karney.' Then he started to laugh like crazy—laughed and laughed." Bill Karney paused; his face lost a little of its color at the memory.



"Go on," said Jerry. "Didn't guess I was in on it, too, did he? Say anything else?"

"Nothing that made sense, Jerry. He went crazy, I guess. Said something about hands—red hands, that was it. He yelled at me, 'Come and get the stuff, Karney—and get the red hands, too.' What d'ya suppose he meant by that?"

Jerry Martin shrugged. "Probably getting poetic, meant your bloody hands, red with his blood, most likely."

"Yeah. But why should I get 'em, then? What did he mean by that?"

"Nothing, probably," said Jerry, flicking his cigarette into a pool shortly off the trail. "Maybe he meant you'd give yourself away or something like that and get caught. I don't know. Anyway, he's dead." But looking at Karney, who was now obviously nervous, Jerry went on. "Maybe he meant he'd come back and watch there, Bill. He was always a little bugs on ghosts and things; you know that." He looked shrewdly at his partner, and noted with satisfaction that his tentative shot had told.

"God, Jerry—d'you think maybe he could come . . . back?"

"Boloney, Bill! What say we get moving?"

"Okeh." Bill Karney got up slowly, not quite as surely as he had moved heretofore. But suppose he could come back, Jerry—what then?"

For a moment Jerry Martin was sorry he had suggested it. He motioned impatiently toward the trail, saying, "Aw, he won't, Bill. I'm just stringing you. Get along, now."

Once more the two men began their struggle with the tangled underbrush, fighting their way through the jungle in which the seldom-travelled trail helped almost not at all. Karney looked around suddenly. "Wanta go ahead, Jerry?" he asked.

"No. Why?" Jerry Martin was suspicious.

Karney hesitated. "Weber's lying up there ahead—what's left of him, that is—I don't want to see him first, Jerry. He must be pretty far gone by this time."

"Rot," snorted Martin. "Go on ahead!" Looking at his companion's

hesitant, frightened face, he thought that Bill Karney would be easy to manage when the time came.

As they went on, Jerry Martin thought back to the beginning of the business. Three months before he had first heard of the man Weber in Calcutta; Weber had brought over one hundred thousand dollars' worth of opium with him from the interior of India. At that time he had it in Calcutta, hidden in a cheap house in one of the worst streets in that city. Then Weber had been tipped off that the police were on his trail, and, in a desperate attempt to save his forbidden treasure from discovery, had carted it off to Churda, a deserted island about two hundred miles up the coast and three miles from the mainland. It was safe there, because for some reason Churda had a bad reputation among the natives.

Jerry could not remember how he had run into Bill Karney. Probably he had come upon him on a drunk somewhere. At any rate, he had told Karney all about Weber, promising him half the loot if he followed Weber and got him out of the way. The loot would be sold in Calcutta, even at the cost of lower prices, rather than in America, where prices were high, because there was too much danger in smuggling it across.

The rest had been simple enough. Karney and he had followed Weber, and Karney had taken care of Weber while Jerry waited on the beach. That was over two months ago. They had left the stuff on Churda, and gone back to Calcutta, it would not do to bring it back while the police might still be looking up the men Weber had been seen with.

That Bill Karney was at heart a coward, Jerry Martin now knew. He had asked Bill for the details of the killing of Weber several times, but Karney had never told him before precisely what had taken place in there. Now, as they approached the scene of Weber's death, Bill Karney seemed to have become suddenly terrified again, and under the spell of his fear had blurted out the details, even to the precise words of the crazed dying man, of the murder that had so terrified him. Now, Karney, over six feet tall, with great arms and hulking shoulders, with

the strength of a gorilla, was visibly afraid, and his ugly, pock-marked face had gone a sickly yellow with his fear.

Afraid to see what was left of Weber, was he? Jerry Martin chuckled audibly, so that Karney turned quickly, looking apprehensively over his shoulder.

"What's the matter, Jerry?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Jerry.

The two men went on toward the center of the island, crashing through the underbrush and foliage, disturbing strange birds that fluttered in the heavy leaves and called out in their weird voices, stepping down strange red lilies and mauve orchids that grew in their path.

"Go on!" snapped Martin.

Karney turned and broke once more through brush and tangle. Jerry Martin came to a stop, throwing a quick glance around him. Then he drew his revolver from his pocket, raised it and took deliberate aim at Karney. The weapon spoke suddenly above the clamor of the birds.

Bill Karney half turned, then crashed to the ground. For a moment Jerry Martin halted, hesitating, waiting to hear whether Karney was dead or not. There was no sound; Jerry had aimed well. A great orange bird rose suddenly from the near by bushes and moved away with a tremendous flapping of wings. Then all was quiet.

Jerry moved forward cautiously, never once looking back. Bill Karney lay where he had fallen; he was dead. Jerry stepped across the lifeless body and went on, keeping his eyes glued to the barely perceptible trail where Weber had crashed through over two months before. Once he lost it, he knew that he, too, was lost. As he went along he smiled at the memory of Bill Karney, wanting three quarters of the loot for himself.

Presently he emerged into a space almost devoid of trees, where vines hung from the bushes and crawled over the miry ground. In the center of the small enclosure he saw a soggy, swampy spot, in which the top of a half buried box was just visible. That was what he came for.

Jerry Martin stood on the edge of the clearing and mopped his forehead with a dirty handkerchief. Here the atmosphere was more heavy, more nauseous than it had been on the trail, and the heat seemed

even more oppressive and stifling. Everything was quiet, unnaturally so. Even the birds seemed to avoid this spot. The quiet was deadly, almost frightening, and he, too, now felt something of the unknown fear that had upset Karney so short a time before. Jerry looked back along the dim trail, almost expecting some one to appear. There was nothing; the silence was tomb-like.

It was then that a new odor came to his nostrils, an odor of rotteness, of putrescence. He pushed his way carefully ahead, peering questioningly before him, and saw what was left of Weber. Jerry Martin jerked his head sharply away, but he was drawn once more to look at what had been Weber, the sight that Karney had so feared to see. He looked at the rotting body that lay not far from his feet, half covered by the jungle's green slime, yet revealing the utterly unrecognizable face of a man, flesh fallen away from the browning bones.

Hesitating there, Jerry Martin thought of the fear Weber had put into Bill Karney by his insane jabbering about "red hands." Coming to think of it, what had Weber meant, anyway? "Get the red hands, too," he had said. That didn't make sense. Was it a warning, or a threat? With a gesture of impatience he brushed through the low hedge of green that circled the spot where the body and half buried box lay. He noticed at once that there had been no attempt made to bury the box, that it had simply been dropped into the mire.

Then abruptly he felt a sharp, stinging sensation on his arm. An insect, he thought, but when he looked at his arm, he could find no mark, and he remembered that here he had seen neither insect nor bird. He looked at his arm again. With a cry he saw clearly outlined on his flesh, rapidly swelling and growing, a bright red mark—the mark of a hand, as if it had grasped his forearm and pressed so hard that the blood sprang and filled in the marks of palm and fingers. But Jerry knew that there had been no hand, that there could be no hand, for Weber lay before him, and had not moved, would never move again.

He plunged madly forward, and again he felt sharp stinging pains—first in the same arm, then in the other, and again on his back, through his thin shirt. The pain grew suddenly, maddeningly, creeping all along his arms, up to his shoulders and into them. Jerry Martin stood there



like a man propped up in death, his eyes bulging, staring before him. He was looking at the peculiar green vines that hedged him in.

They were moving, undulating slowly back and forth, yet coming closer, pressing against him. His eyes sought out the leaves that had touched him, the leaves like human hands—on the undersides were drops of blood—his blood! Even as he stood there, he felt a slow and terrible paralysis creeping into his limbs and upward, straining toward his heart.

He began to sway a little, like the wavering plants surrounding him; then abruptly he fell in the midst of the leaves, feeling them pressing close around him. He remembered Weber's words not—"Get the red hands, too!"

He lay there for a moment quietly, then he began to struggle to turn over on his back, and after what seemed an eternity of agony, he did so, already feeling his legs useless, paralysis creeping slowly up toward his heart. From all sides, the plant hands were bending toward him.

A great fan-like leaf moved into the line of his vision from above, hovering over his face; then, insidiously, it edged closer, covering his face from his mouth to his eyes, its rubbery surface undulating sensuously, and drew away again.

Jerry Martin wrenched his mouth open, but no sound came. His face was a great red splotch in the black mire; as he lay there, his eyes went slowly up, up, till there were only the blank whites left to stare unseeingly at the pale blue sky above the silent jungle.

## *They Shall Rise*

Sometimes I have tried to tell this story, but I have always failed. Even when I knew it was all over, when I found myself strapped on a cot in the university hospital, perfectly cognizant of my surroundings, with all those eager faces leaning toward me and Doctor Montague standing near me, urging me to speak, I could not. Thoughts and words were all a hopeless jumble, and I knew that what I was saying was but incoherent fragments of sentences, words without meaning. I *tried* to tell the story as it happened, and in my mind the whole thing was clear as day, but I could not say. They thought I had lost my mind; for a while I, too, thought so. They gave me up as hopeless, in the end, and sent me home. They did not understand that men sometimes come through experiences so horrible that they are unable ever after to speak coherently of them. The last of that experience is not six months away, and I am going to write what I have never been able to say.

Stan Elson and I were fourth year medics at the University of Wisconsin. One night last spring we had been working fairly late in a Science Hall laboratory, and when we had finished, Stan had gone out before me. It was raining. Just as I came out of the door and started running down the steps toward him, Stan was coming back up.

"Where the devil have you been, Valens?" he asked, as I came up to him. "Why didn't you say it'd take you a while yet; I've been standing here in the rain, thinking you were on my heels. I might just as well have been inside."

"It was the most extraordinary thing, Stan. I wasn't more than eighty feet behind you—but, by the way, you must have passed the old boy."

"Passed whom?"

"The old man who stopped me in the hall. I'd just turned the corner to take the stairs and almost ran into him; a tall, pasty-faced individual, dressed in old-fashioned clothes—long black frock coat, muffler, beaver hat; carried an old green umbrella. You must have seen him."

Elson shook his head. "I saw no one."

"That's strange. I would have sworn that he passed you."

"He might have been in the building," said Elson a little sharply.

I shook my head. "No, I don't think he was," I said.

I put up the collar of my slicker and turned to walk at Elson's side. We descended to the road and started up Langdon Street. The rain came down in sheets on the asphalt and ran along the gutters in swift streams. I said nothing, thinking of the stranger I had seen in the corridor. Finally my silence grated on Stan.

"Well, what about him?" he said almost irritably, "the man in the hall."

"Oh, nothing exactly," I answered. "Struck me as rather queer, that's all. Asked to look over the dissection laboratories, and mumbled something about his interest in anatomical fields. His face hit me, though so damned white; looked like a Frosh who'd stumbled into a lab by accident."

Elson chuckled. "What'd you tell him?"

"Said I didn't have any authority; for all of me he could go ahead. He was very grateful, and went. I repeated that I couldn't be held responsible if he were found there. He only smirked and thanked me again. I didn't like the look of that fellow at all."

"I wouldn't hold his looks against him," said Elson. "That's something none of us has much choice about."

"I was thinking about something I read recently," I began. Then I broke off and looked at Stan. "Have you read the *Cardinal* of late?"

Elson smiled. "Not since I was wearing the green, Valens. Why?"

"For the past few weeks it's been carrying some mighty odd articles

And I think that an old man, dressed in old fashioned clothes, and carrying a green umbrella, was mixed up in most of them."

Elson stopped in the rain, grasping my arm abruptly. "Valens!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean those laboratory disturbances?"

"You've heard of them, then," I said. "There's been some strange talk."

"Those horrible things that started at Columbia, and spread to Harvard and Yale, and all the Eastern universities and colleges. And they've been hushed up considerably, too, if I'm any judge."

I nodded. "Yes. Two days ago they were at the University of Chicago, and at Northwestern, and at Illinois. Do you understand what that suggests?"

"Do you think . . ." began Elson, but I read his question and cut him off.

"Two were killed at Columbia, seven at Harvard, five at Yale, four at Princeton . . . need I go on? I know them all, and needless to say, I did not get most of my information from the papers because I *know* that most of it was suppressed. Friends have written me most of it. Forty-seven students . . . medics . . . have died from mysterious causes since the trouble began in the East. Found cold and distorted, and no sign on them as to how they might have been killed! I've been watching the thing. And that's not all . . . it's not only in this country, but for years . . . for years, it's been all over the world! In 1873, at the University of Edinburgh. In 1880 at Guy's in London. Not five years later in Vienna, then the Sorbonne, Heidelberg, Bonn . . . all over the Continent, in all the major institutions for medical research. And now it has come to America."

Elson broke in. "But what's behind it?"

"I don't know, I'm going to try to find out!"

We walked on in the rain, neither speaking. Then I began again, and I think I must have given away the repressed excitement I was feeling. "Do you know, Stan, I've seen that old man before, I think."

"Where?"

"I don't know. I haven't the remotest idea. But I'm going to look him up . . ." I stopped suddenly, glancing abruptly at the row of houses along



the street. I was about to say good-night to Elson, for we stood before the house in which I lived. Then I realized that I was without my notebook.

"Hell! Stan, I forgot my notebook."

"Don't need it tonight, do you?"

"I do. I've got to get up that back work. It's due tomorrow."

"Going back?"

"I'll have to, I'm afraid. Want to walk along?"

"Might as well. I haven't anything better to do."

We turned and started back up the wet street. The rain was still coming down. We had not gone far when we met two of our fellow-students who had been working in the laboratory when we had left it shortly before.

"Where to?" one of them asked.

"You didn't notice my notebook on my table, did you, Asham? I left it up there somewhere."

"Didn't see it. Everybody's gone now."

"Lab's not locked, is it?"

"Wasn't when we left. But we saw the janitor down the hall," said Dean, the younger of the two.

"We'll have to make it before he leaves," I said.

We went on up the street toward Science Hall, and Asham and Dean were lost in the rain.

"Suppose we'll meet your pale friend?" asked Elson.

"I don't know. The janitor has probably put him out if he's been wandering around the building in the fashion he was when I met him."

We mounted the stone steps leading up to Science Hall, and pulled open the heavy door. The dim hall lights of the building seemed to be the only ones burning. We started up the first of the five flights we had to climb, when, looking up suddenly, we saw the old man with the umbrella standing motionless before us.

"Hello!" I cried. "Find the laboratories all right?"

The fixed smile on the man's dead white face gave place to a frown. "No, no," he said in a soft voice. "I have changed my mind."

"We're going up now," offered Elson. Don't you want to come up with us?"

"No, no. Thank you I will return in the morning." He eyed us closely and brushed past down the stairs. His footsteps fell heavily, echoing in the stillness. Elson and I turned and followed him with our eyes.

"Funny way of walking," observed Elson.

"Like a machine," I suggested.

The retreating figure of the old man disappeared in the hall below. We heard the great outer door close after him.

"Well, let's go on," said Elson.

We had just started up the stairs again when a voice behind us called loudly, "Where to, boys?" Once more we turned. It was the janitor.

"Oh, I left my notebook in 500 I've got to have it. We were only going up to get it."

"Well, I'm just going up there to lock up. I'll go with you."

The janitor joined us, and we went slowly up the five flights of steps. At last we came to the door of Room 500 Asham and Dean, the last to leave, had apparently turned off the lights, for all was dark. But the door was unlocked, and for a moment I fancied I heard a stealthy movement within. Then I opened the door and turned on the lights.

For a minute I noticed nothing; then, abruptly, I stopped dead in my path across the room to my table, feeling the blood rush from my face

"Stan! Mr. Brown!" I called, without moving.

"The two came running into the room.

"My God!" cried Elson

The janitor stood speechless, his mouth open.

There before us were four cadavers, propped into peculiarly life-like positions, stiff and rigid, their opened eyes staring glassily before them. One of them was seated, his dead fingers gripped tightly on the arms of the chair. Another leaned against the wall, his knees bent, as if he would fall in another moment. Yet he did not fall. The other two were perhaps the most horrible. They sat on the edge of a table, side by side, as students sit when resting from their work; but on the faces of these dead things were utterly shocking expressions — expressions not at all like those of people long dead, long preserved, but rather like

those of people newly dead. Their lips were lifted above their teeth in frightful, unspeakably horrible leers.

The janitor was the first to find his voice "This is Asham's idea of a good joke," he said.

"Nonsense!" I snapped "No medical student would do anything like this. This is *not* our idea of a good joke. It's some outsider, someone else." And all the time I was thinking this happened in Europe, in the East, at Illinois, Northwestern, Chicago. And now here . . .

"I'm going to call Doctor Montague," said the janitor, making for the door. "You two wait," he called back.

Elson looked at me, incredulity on his face. "What does it mean?" he whispered.

I shook my head. "I don't know. But I do know that it wasn't Asham and Dean." I turned quickly from Elson and the scene before us, determined to forget the horrible suggestions that rushed into my mind.

Elson said, "It's lucky the 'stiff float' wasn't open. No telling what might have happened if it had been."

I nodded in agreement. A shudder of horror passed through my body at the thought. In a moment more the janitor was back in the room.

"This yours?" he asked curtly, picking up a notebook from my table. I went forward and took it from him. "Doctor Montague will be down in a little while. You boys want to wait? If not, you can go."

"Let's go," suggested Elson hurriedly.

I pulled myself together. "Yes, I've got to finish this work tonight."

Together we left the room. Maddening thoughts pushed themselves into my mind.

Half of the four hour laboratory period was over next morning before the whispered discussions of a *Cardinal* news-story about mysterious disturbances in Laboratory 500 during the previous night had died down. Finally, however, students were once more settling down to work. I was busy at my table, working at Stan's side when suddenly I saw the door of the room slowly pushed open.

In the broad light of day now, we saw the old man with the umbrella

and the pasty face. He was in the act of removing an antiquated beaver hat from his head. From behind square-rimmed spectacles, strange hollow eyes looked curiously into the room. He walked forward a few steps, somewhat uncertainly, moving his tall thin body with short, jerky steps, not unlike those of an automaton. Then suddenly he was speaking to the student nearest the door, in a strikingly repulsive and hollowly gelatinous sort of bass voice. "Would you be so kind as to direct me to Doctor Montague?"

The student to whom he had spoken whirled around on hearing his voice. He backed instinctively away before this strangely repellent man, this man who, though he looked to be fifty, yet gave forth an impression of much greater age, age that could not be put into convincing numbers. "Over there," murmured the student finally, pointing to Doctor Montague, who stood near the table at which I was working with Elson.

The old man approached the professor with the same short, uncertain steps. Doctor Montague looked up.

"You are Professor Montague? You are head of the courses in anatomy here at Wisconsin?"

What a peculiar accent! flashed into my mind.

"Yes, I am Doctor Montague," replied the professor.

"My name is Brock, Doctor Septimus Brock. My practise is in Scotland, though now I am touring your splendid country. As my interests are in medical research, I have naturally been seeking out those places in America which further such work." He indicated the laboratory with a sweep of his hand. "I wonder if it would be possible for me to examine your different laboratories?"

Professor Montague, who had been eyeing his visitor with undisguised curiosity, came to himself suddenly, saying, "Certainly, Doctor Brock; let me call a guard to show you around."

"Thank you, Professor."

Elson and I had been standing at our table listening intently to this short conversation. The sudden appearance of an assistant sent both of us quickly to work. Elson, however, who was by nature nervous, in turning so suddenly to his cadaver and attempting to resume his work



casually, as if nothing had happened, quite accidentally severed the tongue in the head of his specimen.

Then something unaccountably strange occurred. The man with the umbrella, who had apparently observed the accident, jumped at once to Elson's side. He looked at him sharply and said in a cold voice, 'You deface the dead!' There was a surprizing malevolence in his glance, which escaped neither Elson nor me.

Elson, who was at once thoroughly upset, began to explain. "I'm sorry, I assure you, it was purely accidental."

Professor Montague, who had been observing as well, said with a casual gesture, "It's all right, Elson. Accidents will happen."

He turned to the man at his side. "Your comment about defacing the dead, Doctor Brock, seems to me somewhat strange coming from a medical man."

The old man pulled himself up and made a careless motion with the hand that gripped the green umbrella. 'Of course, Doctor Montague I am losing the scientific attitude, I fear. It seemed needlessly careless."

Doctor Montague nodded shortly. A guard had come forward at a motion from him. "Your guard, Doctor Brock. I hope you will find the laboratories of sufficient interest to justify your visit. Please order the guard about at your pleasure."

"Thank you, Doctor Montague. You are kind indeed." With that he turned to the guard and spoke to him in a voice that could not be overheard. But in a moment the guard was leading the way to the short corridor leading to a group of smaller laboratories.

Then, for the second time that morning, something strange happened.

It was Elson who first noticed. "Look at Dean!" he whispered excitedly to me.

I looked up. Dean, a pale and very sensitive young man, stood staring at the approaching Doctor Brock, his eyes wide and fixed. It flashed into my mind that something had powerfully upset him for I had seen him react to strong mental stimuli, hypnotic stimuli, before. Dean had evidently been at work, for he still held tightly to a large dissecting-knife. The doctor passed his table with the guard, never once looking

at Dean; the student turned his whole body and continued to regard our visitor with that unnatural stare.

Then suddenly it happened Dean's hand shot up, and, as if the arm had been loosed by a powerful spring, the knife went flying at the doctor's back. It lodged there, thudding against his back with a horrible dull sound. Dean screamed suddenly and collapsed limply in his chair.

Then his voice rang hysterically through the laboratory. "I couldn't help it, I couldn't! I had to do it!" He put his head on his arms and began to sob wildly.

But strangest of all was the attitude of Doctor Brock. He turned calmly around, apparently not noticing the affected student nor the rest of us standing aghast. He reached behind him and drew away the knife just as Doctor Montague ran forward.

"What's wrong?"

Doctor Brock smiled his characteristic fixed smile. "Nothing at all," he said suavely. "Fortunately, it lodged in my clothing." He held the knife in his hand. It was as clean and spotless as it had been when Dean so suddenly threw it!

Doctor Montague took in the situation at a glance. "Buck up, Dean!" He clutched the student by the shoulder. "You'd better come along with me. Sorry this happened, Doctor Brock. I hope it hasn't disturbed you unduly."

"Not at all," replied the old man, and turned abruptly to the guard. "Shall we go on?"

Leaning on the Professor's arm, Dean left the room, while Doctor Brock and his guard went down the corridor. There was an excited babble among the students.

Elson turned to me in great agitation. "My God, I thought Dean got him!"

"I'd have sworn that knife went six inches into his back!" I said, grasping Elson's wrist suddenly, holding it tight in my hand. I could feel myself trembling.

Turning simultaneously, we saw the guard unlocking the metal-barred door to the "stiff" room, where all the cadavers of the medical school lined the walls and floated in the great preserving vat.

That night, at my request, Elson came to my room. I was sitting at my desk before a row of heavy medical books, a lamp with a green glass shade bent close to the open book through which I was leafing. Elson sat in a deep chair in the gray darkness at the side of my desk, lost almost entirely in shadows, his eyes watching me. I closed the book suddenly and turned to him. "I *know* I've seen him somewhere. If it's a picture I saw, I'm almost positive it's in one of my books. I haven't used the library at all this year, nor during most of the last."

I pulled another book down before me—an out-of-print medical encyclopedia—and again went quickly through the pages.

"Got him," I said. "Come here, Stan."

Elson rose and came over to the desk. He leaned over my shoulder, and together we read: "Brock, Septimus Asa, M.D., born, 1823, Duncardin, Scotland. Unmarried. Educated at University of Edinburgh. Set up small practise there, and practised for about four years, during which time he wrote and published two small pamphlets and a monograph. *The Dead: How Shall We Regard Them?*; *A Treatise on the Horror of Dissection*, and *When the Soul Has Gone, Shall the Body Die?* These three works, especially the latter, though now out of print, were regarded as the product of a deranged mind, and after an examination, Doctor Brock was incarcerated in Denham Asylum for the Insane. From this asylum he disappeared in 1872, his disappearance being made doubly mysterious by the fact that he was at the time on his death-bed, and was certainly too weak to walk. He was never again heard from, and it is assumed that he met his death shortly after his miraculous escape. Doctor Brock's case is mentioned as one of the world's most startling disappearances."

Elson looked down at me. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

"I don't want to guess at it, but I think I'm beginning to see."

"This man with the green umbrella—"

"I have seen him before," I cut in, "or his picture. It was probably his picture. And I think it was in his monograph, *When the Soul Has Gone, Shall the Body Die?* which I think I have on file somewhere."

"Where?" asked Elson, interested now.

I motioned toward a file close to the wall in the darkness where he had been sitting, but I made no move to go toward it.

Elson said, "Why don't you get it?"

Suddenly, inexplicably, I shuddered. A most peculiar feeling came over me abruptly, an odd feeling of fear, of warning, telling me not to go on. I turned quickly to Stan, explaining that sudden sensation.

"Nonsense!" he cut in sharply. "Your imagination's working on your nerves, old man."

I came to my feet with an effort and went stiffly to the file. There I pulled open the top drawer, and my fingers began to go swiftly through the miscellaneous papers it contained. The monograph was not there, nor was it in the second. It was half hidden in the third drawer, where I found it only when I went over the papers a second time. I drew it out hurriedly and brought it over to the desk, putting it down in the green glow of the desk lamp.

On the cover under the title there was a dim, poorly reproduced picture of a man with square-rimmed glasses, and the man was terrifyingly like the doctor who had visited the laboratory that morning, was indeed the same man, if I were any judge. Yet that would place his age above one hundred years!

I sat down slowly, put out a hesitant hand, and turned the first two pages of the monograph. I was not eager to read what was printed therein. The text seemed to leap out at me, its first words flung across the page in heavy blackface. "*There is a use in life for bodies from which the soul has gone!*"

Elson laughed unconvincingly. "How awkwardly he points out their use for anatomical purpose!" he said.

I looked at him. "Do you think so, Stan?"

"Don't you?"

I closed the monograph suddenly, once again I shuddered. "No," I said. "I don't. I remember this thing now very distinctly."

"Old man, I think something's the matter with you," said Elson quickly. "Do you think a shot of gin would do us any good? You're making me feel whatever it is you're feeling."

Impatiently, I brushed the suggestion aside. "A paper on the



power of animation which certain little known aspects of black magic have over dead bodies. And there is something about ways in which the soul can be driven from a living body and the body kept animate." I was talking more to myself than to Elson, but suddenly, looking closely at my friend, I said, "Was he mad, do you think?"

"Mad as a hatter," said Elson quickly.

I went on, "He disappeared, they said, but he was never really found; they never recovered his body."

"No, no, not that," said Elson suddenly, his face revealing the feeling of terror suddenly gripping him. "The man could not be Brock. He'd be over a hundred years old. You don't know what you're suggesting."

But I was not listening. Could it be—was it possible that he had animated himself?

"Listen," I murmured abruptly, taking Stan's arm; "he wrote something about dead bodies rising against the living through the power of this weird hypnotic influence, great masses of dead rising."

Once more I turned to the monograph, leafing rapidly through it, stopping on the last page. "*I shall return, and lay hands upon them, and they shall become animate. And they shall rise in great numbers, they shall rise up against those who have defaced them, against those who have defiled their bodies for other men. They shall rise against all the living, and weapons shall be powerless against them. And they shall sweep over all the earth, slaying and destroying, and I shall be their lord and master; for without me, without the power that shall emanate from me, they die and shall be for ever dead. O dead, look for the day! I shall come, and you shall rise against the living!*" "

Elson shook my arm almost roughly. "That's madness! It's the raving of a madman!"

I put my hands on the table to steady myself. Elson went on, urgently, "Let's drop this stuff, Valens. We've still got our notebooks to get up tonight, remember. We've set this night to finish the job."

I nodded. "Of course," I said. "I'd forgotten. We'd better hurry to the lab—it's almost nine now."

Elson was at the same time relieved and uneasy. I think he thought for a moment that I had let my nerves get the better of me, and felt

glad at the same time that he had kept his own imagination so well under control. Yet he was oddly uneasy about returning to the laboratory, that same laboratory where Doctor Septimus Brock had walked that morning. He shrugged his shoulders and said nothing, fearing, no doubt, that he would excite me again.

We entered the laboratory with some trepidation, though neither of us showed his uneasiness. We went to work immediately, and yet felt not in the least like working, nor did we work particularly rapidly. After a while, Elson leaned back and lit a cigarette.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Ten o'clock," I told him, looking at my watch.

"On this dissection of the heart, do you have—"

"Listen!" I said, breaking into his sentence. I had heard something

"What's the matter?"

"Stan, didn't you hear a noise just then?"

"No."

"As if someone were talking, far away?"

"Yes. That must be it." I shuddered.

Elson turned again to his notebook, keeping an eye on me still. "In this dissection of the heart," he began again, "do you have a cross of the left auricular—"

"Listen!" I said again, tense now, my body rigid in the chair.

There *was* a sound, and both of us heard it. And we were alone in the laboratory, alone on the floor. Someone was talking in a deep voice, but the voice seemed to come from a great distance, away on the campus perhaps, or in a vault below the buildings; yet there was a curiously terrifying quality in the deep tones coming to us in the somber stillness. And there was an additional sound, a confused pattering, soft yet distinct, as if many people were running bare-footed here and there on a hard floor.

"Do you hear it?" I asked quickly.

Elson nodded. "I hear it. But where is it? And what is it?"

I got up and walked slowly toward the door that opened on the locked and barred "stiff" room. I pressed my ear to the metal. Then as I turned to Elson I felt the blood drain from my face. My lips

opened, trembling, eager to speak, but no sounds came. I had heard something within; those mysterious noises had come from behind the door to the "stiff" room. Elson came toward me, but I motioned him away. Abruptly I spoke in a horror-strangled voice, and I felt the grotesque impression I made on Stan. "It's in there—the stiff—someone talking—walking on bare feet!"

I broke away from the door, breathing heavily.

Elson said, "We'll get the janitor. Someone with authority ought to be here."

I shook my head. "No, no," I murmured. "No one else, Stan. No one would believe us, and besides, I think we can handle this better ourselves."

"What do you mean?"

"No one else knows about Doctor Brock and that monograph."

Elson made an uneasy movement with his head. "What shall we do?" he asked.

"We've got to get a look into that room—whatever it is in there must not see us, must not know we are here. That means we can't try the door."

"There's another dissecting-room upstairs, over the float. There's a panel in the floor. Perhaps we can look through that?"

"Have you got a flashlight, Stan?"

"In my locker."

Elson went to his locker and brought out a pocket flashlight that he kept there. With this, we found our way through the now darkened hall of the building and up the wide stairs. The sounds we had heard in the laboratory were stilled now, but when we had reached the floor above, when we had crossed the threshold of the dissecting room and were standing directly above the float-room, we heard again the deep, eery voice, but now the footsteps had stopped. I directed the light to the floor and moved it slowly to the center of the room, and then, in the compass of the ray, we saw the panel. We walked silently over and came down on our knees beside it. The voice was clear now, and the more clear it became, the more weird it grew—a chillingly hollow voice, a voice of deep yet flat tones, thrilling us with horror. It was

saying something we could not understand, and every now and then there would be answers in chorus.

I laid the flashlight on the floor and we pressed our ears to the panel. Still the words were not clear, yet some of them came. ". . . defiled, abused . . . long have I been in coming . . . but I am come . . . others waited to feel my power calling to them again; once they, too, felt it, as you feel it . . . now. Tonight you have tasted strength; you have tried your limbs and found them not wanting . . . some have suspected, but they have died . . . our purpose is lost if I am gone, for in me lies the power that will raise you to the heights "

"This is madness," murmured Elson, his face strained, white

"Not madness," I whispered guardedly; "worse sorcery, black sorcery!"

The droning voice below went on "Over all Europe they have felt my touch . . . they are waiting now for the call to rise up in great numbers and destroy . . . and death is powerless against them."

My fingers crept silently over the panel, seeking to push it open. The crevice in the floor broadened into a slit-like opening. I opened it no more than six inches; then both of us bent our heads over the aperture. Excited babble came from below, and by the light of the flash reflected dimly from the surface of the stiff-float below, we saw a crowd of dripping nude bodies, leaning eagerly forward, pressing around a fully clothed man who stood in their midst. The man was Doctor Septimus Brock, and the others . . . those others . . . had until today been floating in the now empty vats!

"Get that light out!" I growled.

Elson's fingers closed on the flashlight; it slipped, thudded to the floor. In that instant, below us, the head of Septimus Brock was suddenly thrown back, glassy eyes staring upward, an arm half raised to shield his face. We drew back. *Had he seen us?*

The light was out now, and I quickly pushed the panel to. We rose and crept silently from the room, the flash throwing its ray before us as we went down the stairs, into our own laboratory, where we took our notebooks, and out into the street. Neither of us spoke until we were well up Langdon Street.



"I'm not sure," Elson said at last, "exactly what he's aiming at."

'Wait,' I told him "That pamphlet tells it. I'll show you."

In my room once more, I took up the monograph and turned to Elson. 'His general theory is that he has a power which enables him to animate dead bodies for his own use, and against these bodies no ordinary weapon has any power. I feel that his is a hypnotic power self-induced with the aid of sorcery, of which he seems to have been a student. His intention is simply to organize the dead of the world—and what better place to recruit them than dissecting-laboratories?—but it is necessary for him first to establish contact with them, or else he can have no future power over them. That is why he has taken so long, so many years since his escape from the asylum. He is looking forward to the day when the dead shall rise against the living, sent into the world to destroy, through his power."

"But his motive?" demanded Elson. "He's mad, raving mad!"

"The motive is here, too," I went on, everything suddenly clear now, and my thoughts collected after that last tremendous shock in the laboratories. I read from the monograph: "'Men have called me mad. Even now there are some who contemplate my incarceration in an asylum. I am fully aware of all this. I wait for it, for my revenge on society will be more terrible, more awful, with this injustice rankling in my breast. For I, Septimus Brock, have power to give life to the dead. I shall give them life, and there will come a day when they shall rise up against the society which has looked upon my work as that of a madman, against the society which has mutilated and defiled those who have died!'"

'My God!" Elson murmured in a strangled voice, clutching me by the arm. "The way he looked at me yesterday when I cut out that tongue! The way he looked at me! . . ."

I was rudely awakened next morning by someone shaking me.

"Awake, Valens?" I heard.

I pulled myself up, yawning, and nodded.

It was Stan. He was speaking.

"Remember yesterday morning, Valens? . . . that guard . . . Septimus Brock?"

I nodded again, only half understanding. As I took the paper from Elson I saw that it was the morning's *Cardinal*. Stan had marked a small paragraph on an inner page, circling it in heavy black crayon:

It is reported that Henry Petersen, a guard in the Science department, did not return home last night. Inquiries have brought no response. Anyone knowing the possible whereabouts of Henry Petersen will please communicate at once with John Petersen, through the *Cardinal*.

Elson was looking at me inquiringly.

I said, hurriedly, "It was Petersen with Brock yesterday morning. Petersen went into the stiff room with Brock. Did he come out?"

Elson shook his head. "I didn't see him."

"Nor I." I paused, took up the paper, and looked at it again. "And I didn't see Brock come out either," I added.

Elson fidgeted. "Valens, did we see people in the stiff-room last night? Or was it, do you think, our imagination?"

I looked at him. "What do *you* think?"

I jumped from my bed before he could answer, and began to dress, leaving Elson agape near the bureau.

I turned to him abruptly and said, "Listen, Stan, I'm not coming to lab this morning. I've got something else to do—something more important."

"May I know what it is?"

Should I tell Elson? I wondered. Then I said, "Only a silver bullet has any power against black magic, I understand." I was trying to speak matter-of-factly. "I am definitely curious to know how a silver bullet would affect Doctor Brock."

I was gone before Elson could say another word.

It was already quite late that night when I returned to my room and found the note that Elson had left for me. I took it up and read

Brock was in the lab again this morning. Doc Montague told me he had asked about us, asking especially about "that student who had cut the tongue yesterday." Call me when you come in.

I read the note a second time, musingly, my hand straying unconsciously to my coat pocket, caressing the revolver hidden there. Then I went to the telephone and called Elson's number. A strange voice answered me—certainly not Elson's.

"This Asham?" I ventured.

"Yes. Who's calling?"

"Valens. Where's Stan?"

"He went out after he got your note."

I started. "My note?" What's that? Repeat that, Asham."

"I said he went out after he got your note. Just a minute."

There was a sound suggesting that Asham had left the telephone. What was this about a note from me? Good God, was it perhaps . . . I thought quickly of something I had heard in that half-real conversation from the stuff room the night before—"Some have suspected—they have died! But Asham was back, reading:

"Stan, come pronto to 500 Science Hall. I've struck something."

—Didn't you send that, Valens? There's a 'V' or something at the bottom, like a signature."

I said, "I always sign notes to Stan like that, but I sent him no note tonight. You're sure that came tonight?"

"Positive. Say, Valens, there nothing wrong, is there? You know, Stan's been acting sort of queer, and I thought maybe—you know, a fellow can't help thinking, Valens."

I dropped the receiver, pushing the telephone away from me. There was no time to lose. Something had gone wrong. I ran from the house, and began to tear down Langdon Street toward Science Hall, rearing itself upward at its end.

The hall was dark, save for a faint illumination from the window of laboratory room number 500. I slunk silently into the building, paused to listen for sounds, and not hearing any, went softly along, up the stairs, one flight, two, holding my breath at each creak of the stairs. There was no light in the hall on the top floor. I paused uncertainly. Should I go on? There was no telling what I might encounter. The feeling of the revolver and the memory of the silver bullet reassured me. I went on.

A dark figure loomed up suddenly beside the door to room 500. For an instant I drew back, then came forward again. It was Elson I went on, more quickly now.

"Stan," I whispered, "thank God you're all right! What's up?"

Elson did not answer. He put his finger to his lips, signing for silence. I came up to him.

"Nothing the matter, is there?" I asked, suddenly suspicious once more.

Elson waved one hand before him for silence, still pressing his finger to his colorless lips. Terror suddenly possessed me. I slipped my hand into my pocket, feeling the revolver close to my skin. Elson's face was so white, his eyes so unnaturally glassy, expressionless, as if he were dazed from a horrible fright.

Then he put his hand suddenly on the knob of the door, indicating with his head that I should precede him. Still facing him, I edged through the partly open door. Then, just as I had crossed the threshold, I saw through Elson's half-parted lips, saw a cavity which brought to me abruptly a terrifying vision of a tongueless cadaver, and two fierce blazing eyes boring at Elson from beneath a shock of white hair and an old beaver hat. God, what happened to Elson . . . his tongue?

Instantly warned, I whirled. Before me I saw what seemed to be an endless host of cadavers, and at their head a tall frock-coated figure — Doctor Brock. I understood. They had lured Elson here, to punish him for mutilating his cadaver, to set him up as an example for the rest of the world. . . . Then Elson was . . . not living . . . yet he walked! There was a slow movement toward me, the doctor smiling malevolently, hissing something at me. I felt what had been Elson advancing from behind, and in that moment I lunged forward, grasping the wrist of the living dead man before me. At the same instant I pulled the trigger in my pocket, saw in a fleeting glance a frozen expression of terror on that malignant dead face peering into my own, and, amid the sounds of falling bodies dinning into my semi-conscious ears, there rose the welcome sound of quick-running footsteps on the stairs beyond. Then I knew no more, save an overwhelming blackness that pressed upon me from all sides.



I opened my eyes on the grim face of Doctor Montague, bending over the bed to which I was strapped. My ears were hearing a voice, my own voice, coming from far away:

"... lured him there, killed him . . . driving the soul from his body by their magic . . . Brock's black sorcery. . . But now they shall never rise . . . never, that hellish throng . . . he is dead for ever."

I saw Doctor Montague's face grow anxious. His voice came, suddenly, he was speaking to someone else. "Give me the paper, please; I want to see whether there is any reaction."

I knew Doctor Montague, and I wanted to say, "Hello, Doc," but somehow I couldn't. They held a paper before me, but it did not register—it meant nothing to me. Again I heard my voice clearer now, strained, trying to tell them coherently what had happened. I thought I spoke clearly enough, but I must only have babbled nonsense. Yet—did I?

There were four days in that hospital, four days during which my brain burned with the knowledge it possessed, a knowledge that my tongue could not release despite my awful desire to tell them everything. At last they sent me home.

Even now they say I am mad; yet they have never made an attempt to explain what happened. Nor have the papers. The cadavers were disturbed, said the papers; but surely they must have seen that all the cadavers had been taken from the "stiff" room by someone, that they had been standing in 500 before they were found collapsed on the floor? Surely they must have seen this? And why did they not explain the finding of the corpse of Henry Petersen, stripped of its clothing, among those others? They told of the finding of Stan's body, of the cutting away of his tongue. How they had been killed, they did not know. There were no signs of external injury.

Asham had pursued me, and found me there, the papers said; I was raving incoherently, in my hand a revolver from which one chamber had been emptied, and in one of the tables a silver bullet had been found embedded. Why did no one guess at the significance of the silver bullet?

And why did they touch so lightly on the most damning facts of all?

*The distinct brownish dust on the floor near me, the odor of age-old decay, the fragments of old clothes, of a pair of antiquated square spectacles, and the remains of an old umbrella; and finally that conclusive evidence in my own hand, clenched tightly even in my delirium, the wrist and hand bones which were too old to have come from the laboratory itself!*

## *Eyes of the Serpent*

It happened so quickly that I was aware only of the swift pattering of running footsteps, of a dark form hurtling through the open French windows of my suburban Chicago home, and of the doors themselves swinging shut under the impetus of a quick, frantic push. Then the lights went out.

But I had turned just quickly enough to see the light from my table reflected in a fear-haunted face bending downward. It was Monica Crittendon's. In a moment her voice came softly out of the darkness.

"Don't move—don't talk. I think I got away from them!"

I came swiftly to her side. She was standing tense and still, her eyes fixed on the deserted street beyond the hedge that marked my lawn. She stood stiffly at my side, trembling a little, drawing her breath in quick, agitated gasps, and looking directly toward the patch of light sprawled across the street beneath the lamp.

Abruptly two burly forms moved beneath the light and vanished in the darkness beyond. She breathed a deep sigh of relief. In the darkness I could feel her relaxation, feel the rigid tenseness leave her body as she swayed toward me.

"Thank God," she sighed. She turned and put on the lamp. "They've lost me," she said.

"What the devil's up? I asked. "You're white as a sheet."

I passed my arm reassuringly around her shoulders. "There's no need to be frightened, Monica," I said. "Tell me what's wrong."

She hesitated a moment, then opened her right hand and let something fall to the table in the light under the lamp. "Look at that," she said.

It was a little black object, painted with red stripes. I took it up wonderingly, turning it about in my hand. It had a head and limbs, and was obviously a crude carving of a human form. A little leather bag was bound around its waist, tightly against its body.

My heart seemed to stop beating for a suffocating second

"Where did you get this?" I asked sharply.

"It was found this morning on Commissioner Allen's desk," she said, in a low voice. Monica Crittendon was Commissioner Allen's private secretary.

"Found?" I asked. "By whom?"

"By me. When I came to the office this morning it was lying on the top of Commissioner Allen's desk. I didn't know what it was then, and left it there. But when the commissioner came in and saw it—I saw his face, white and pale—he was frightened!" She indicated the thing in the glow of the table lamp. "Do you know what it is?"

"It's a voodoo *ouanga*," I said, trying to be casual. "It's a curious thing—the death warning of the Negro *culte des morts*!—a monstrous and horrible group who worshiped Damballah, the serpent god—a cult now stamped out."

She took the *ouanga* from me, looked at it for a moment, and then dropped it to the table again, shuddering. "You're wrong about the cult being stamped out," she said. "Just after the commissioner engaged me, I discovered there was something big going on under cover—something he wasn't letting me in on completely, nor many others. But he made a few arrests last week—a Negro cab driver, a mulatto who danced in a downtown night club, and a janitor in an apartment building. I think that was why he was threatened, why he received this warning."

"How does it come that you have the *ouanga*?" I asked.

Monica Crittendon looked up at me in astonishment. "Haven't you seen in the papers?" she challenged. "The commissioner is dead!"

She shoved a newspaper across the table, letting it fall so that the headlines showed. I read:

HEART ATTACK FATAL TO COMMISSIONER ALLEN:  
DIES AT DESK



"That was what we gave the papers," she said, her voice trembling. "But the commissioner didn't die of a heart attack. He died suddenly, just after I had left the office to transcribe some letters. I had gone only twenty steps or so from his door when I heard his muffled scream. I ran back into his office. He was dead. *His throat had been torn out!*"

I came to my feet, startled.

"Oh, God, how awful it was!" She closed her eyes in an effort to forget the horrible picture seared on her memory. "The commissioner had left a statement about the Negro trouble; he had been writing it when I left the room. Yet, when we came back into that room the statement was gone, all except a tiny fragment clutched in his left hand. And I had just come from that room!"

How near Monica Crittendon was to hysteria I now saw. I moved around the table to her side. She rose suddenly.

"Listen!" she gasped, standing tense, one hand at her throat, the other supporting herself against the table behind her. "I heard something. Perhaps they've found me!"

Her fright reached out and gripped me. I shook it off.

I moved quickly to the French doors, sank to my knees, drew the draperies gently aside. The street light shone on a deserted street. There was nothing there. I crossed the room and looked out into the more shadowed lawn on the other side of the house. Again, nothing.

I drew up a chair and took Monica's hands in mine. They were cold and she was trembling. "Monica," I said, "you're going to stay here tonight and forget about this."

She clenched my hands. "Forget? I can't. I've learned enough—put two and two together—to know that there's a horrible Voodoo cult, a death cult, the cult of the serpent, here in Chicago. They've done strange, hellish things, some of them supernatural. The commissioner knew, but he feared them. He discovered somehow that a beautiful, Creole woman, a Voodoo priestess, was the leader, the *mamaloï*. This *ouanga* was a warning. Now he's dead!"

As I bent to comfort her, my eyes caught the faintest suggestion of movement about the black curtains across the French doors, a shadowy

undulation in the stillness. That was all. I watched the curtains warily—nothing happened. Then I looked at Monica.

"Someone is watching every move we make," she said, in a low voice.

"Nonsense!" I said, but I myself was not convinced. "What was that woman's name?" I asked then. "Didn't he put it down before he died?"

She nodded. "It was on the scrap of paper in his hand—just one line, underscored. '*Look for Ulrika Bayne!*'"

She reached into her bosom and drew out the thin packet of papers which she threw on the table into the light under the lamp. Her eyes closed, and she spoke in an oddly flat voice. "I looked her up. A Voodoo priestess in New Orleans in 1906. Those documents tell the story, everything Allen could get on her. But it doesn't make any difference. *Ulrika Bayne has been dead for twenty-five years!*"

Startled, I examined the papers. There was not much in them, but one fact seemed indisputable. Ulrika Bayne was dead. She had died attempting to make her escape from a hideout just outside New Orleans to which she had been traced. She had been shot by a special police officer from Haiti. The special officer, Gabriel Lantora, had traced three horrible murders to her. She had been shot, furthermore, in sight of some twenty people.

"How did you get these papers?" I asked.

"They were in the commissioner's desk. I don't think *they* knew he had them."

"They? Who?"

She looked at me helplessly. "*They*—those who killed him and took his report. Or perhaps they knew we could get copies from New Orleans." She paused suddenly, her eyes feverish. "I'll be accused of the murder! Don't you see? The commissioner's office was on the seventh floor—all windows locked and barred—the only door was in plain sight all the time, and I had come out of that door only a few minutes before he died. It won't be long before I'll be put under arrest."

"Good God!" I burst out, horrified. "That's ridiculous. You had no motive!"

"Motive or no motive, the police will say I was the only one in

position to have done it. That's why I came directly to you. You've got to help me! I was the only one who *could* have committed the murder. But I didn't. So someone else did. Yet for someone else to have done it was impossible. Then the impossible is true! That's the horrible logic of it! Look—this passage—!”

I looked as directed, impelled by her fright. The passage read.

Evidence had fallen into the hands of Bishop Peale that certain demoniac rites were being practised by Haitian Negroes and some Creoles of New Orleans, implicating several white persons. An investigation by the police disclosed a shocking cult of murder and nameless criminal practices.

Through the agency of Gabriel Lantora, special police officer, who had sworn to find the woman at the head of the cult because of an injury she had done to his family in Haiti, it was brought forward that the cult members embodied many strange and unbelievable powers—not the least of these being the power of dissociating from their bodies the spirit or astral and traveling in this state at will.

Lantora claimed to have the same power and certain evidence which he personally unearthed tended to support this improbable statement.

Lantora claimed that two prominent men in New Orleans were murdered by astrals, very possibly by the astral of the priestess sought. There was also a strong belief current among the Negroes that it was impossible ever to kill any member of the sect. They supposedly had weird rites which they employed to raise bodies from the dead. But these bodies, Lantora claimed, were never fully alive, being used only as stations for the spirit's return.

Since Lantora continued to claim that Ulrika Bayne had murdered the two victims as above, both of whom had been found with throats torn out, Bishop Peale exerted his influence to keep this line of investigation from the public. Lantora, however, demanded that the body of Ulrika Bayne be burned, since this would destroy the astral's station, making it impossible for the astral ever to return to earth. Bishop Peale prevented this, since it would have been a concession to superstition.

I looked up.

"It was the only way Commissioner Allen could have been murdered," Monica said. "I don't want to believe it, but I've got to. You've got to believe it, too. If you don't, you can't help me."

"I still believe humans are murdered by humans," I said, with a confidence I was far from feeling. "But even so, I can help. The first practical step is to find Lantora."

At this point the door of my library opened gently and my sister Harriet came in, greeting Monica effusively. "Are you expecting anyone tonight?" she asked me.

I shook my head. "Why?"

"I thought you should know. There has been a man out under the trees on the lawn for the last half hour, prowling around. It has upset me. And there's been a woman, I think, in front."

Monica half rose from her chair, but sank back again. I ran quickly to the window and from there to the French doors; I saw nothing outside.

I turned to Harriet. "You'd better go upstairs and keep a weather eye open. While you're there, get a room ready for Monica—she's staying tonight. And if you see anyone, rap three times on the floor if he's in front, and twice for the lawn in back of the house."

Harriet hesitated. "Why not call the police?"

A sharp cry escaped Monica. "No Harriet," she said. "We don't want the police in this!"

The door closed behind a puzzled Harriet. Then Monica came running to me. She threw herself into my arms, terribly shaken. "They've found me," she whispered. "I've felt it all along. I told you we were watched. The woman knew!"

I held Monica's shaking body firmly in my arms. I felt fear creeping into my heart, a new fear, apparently causeless, yet having to do with some change that was taking place in the room. Then I saw what it was—the lamp on the table was growing dim, slowly, as if someone had cut in on the electricity. Slowly, surely, the light went down, dwindling almost to nothing, until Monica's face was only a white patch in the eerie darkness.



A cloud of blackness seemed to swirl into the room, cloaking the lamp. Then I saw *her*—and Monica, sensing her turned and saw her, too.

Standing against the black curtains drawn across the French doors was a tall and singularly beautiful woman. Fiery, venomous eyes were fixed on us, the unholy glance roved from Monica to me and back again. We stood paralyzed, unable to move, able only to look.

A long, dark cloak enveloped the creature's slim shape. Linned against the faint light of the street lamp shining through the small space in the partly opened French doors, the cloak seemed to billow slightly here and there, as if disturbed by the breeze. The creature's olive features were lit up by a strange, unholy light. The mouth was an evilly smiling slash in the dark shadow of her face. She stood there holding us rooted by her presence, swaying a little, undulating from side to side as if a wind were bending her there.

And then she came a step forward. Monica and I did not move—we couldn't. We thought we were shouting, but our paralyzed vocal chords gave out no sound. Maddeningly, the womanish creature waited, making us feel the unutterable hatred in her eyes, glowing strangely in the blackness. Then, with a lithe, cat-like movement, she threw something to the table, so that it fell on top of the papers beneath the lamp.

From the corner of my eye I saw it, and even in that almost dark room, where the light that came from the lamp was of the faintest, I knew, perhaps from instinct, or perhaps from the horrible suspicion of the woman's identity, that it was the black and red *ouanga* of the *culte des morts*.

It snapped my tension. Quickly I jumped around the table, putting myself between the woman and Monica.

But something in the attitude of our strange visitor caught me. A subtle change had come over that sinister face, demonically beautiful, like a living mask of hate. Where before the woman had been triumphant, taunting, she now seemed to be hesitant, looking beyond me with an expression closely akin to fear.

She was looking at the door of the library. My God, I thought, Harriet is coming back! I wrenched halfway around. But it was not

Harriet The door was opening slowly, swinging into the room with a faltering, uncertain movement that was not at all like Harriet

I turned again and looked at the woman Now the change was definite and amazing. She had moved back a little, and she seemed to have shrunk together, seemed to have drawn that billowing cloak about her and huddled together in a stooped, frightened posture On her face now was unmistakable terror! She took a step backward, then another

Then suddenly, straightening, drawing her tall body erect, she changed yet again! A ghastly rage swept across her face. She gave tongue, calling out in a furious, terrible voice of baffled hate, "Gabriel! Gabriel! Ah, wretched man!"

From the darkness behind came a contrasting voice, low and gently, sibilant and insidiously powerful. "Go, Ulrika. Presently I will come for you."

And in a flash, with a single backward gliding step, the woman was gone I turned to face the new danger The lamp had flared up again at the woman's disappearance Standing just beyond its light was a tall, thin man dressed in a plain, black suit. I had expected to see a monstrous thing. My overwhelming relief brought a smile to the new visitor's lips.

Once more came his gently voice. "You must forgive me," he said "The door was open, and somehow I found my way here I took advantage of your quiet to steal in upon you. May I introduce myself? I am Gabriel Lantora."

In the now adequate light the figure of Gabriel Lantora, the implacable enemy of Ulrika Bayne, took on shape, and though he continued to stand in the room's outer shadows, we saw that his face bore a kindly expression, though weary. He seemed still comparatively young, and yet there was gray black hair at his temples. He was tall, solidly though not heavily built, and dressed plainly in clothes that might have served either for business or travel. Though his appearance was mild and kindly, his vivid eyes flashed fire. So did his words.

"If you know of Ulrika Bayne, you know me," he said. "And she has been disturbing you. I came here tonight for two reasons—one,

because I knew you were in danger, and two, because I need your help against her. I have come at a vital time. I seek to strike once and for all, and end the struggle between her whom you have just seen and myself. That makes no sense to you, I know."

His face gleamed in the dusk, his eyes were momentarily far away. "But danger makes sense, danger is real, and you are in danger, as that death *ouanga* she has given you testifies. She has already killed your police commissioner, and will not hesitate to kill again." He shrugged. "For her, you know too much. But you shall not die, because I am here to prevent it."

We no longer troubled to fight against the impossible with reason. The impossible was true.

We accepted what Gabriel Lantora told us.

"But how could she have known?" Monica faltered.

"And who is Ulrika Bayne?" I asked. "And why is she here?"

Lantora shrugged. "Those are not important things. She is a Haitian, as I am, and comes originally from a good family in Port au Prince. My father, who was a minister there, denounced Ulrika Bayne from his pulpit one Sunday, after she had been discovered wearing one of the strange haircloth bodices which penitent Voodoo worshipers wear to beg Damballah for forgiveness of nameless sins.

"Well, on the day after he gave his sermon, he received the death warning of the *culte des morts*—together with an anonymous letter asking him to withdraw his denunciation of Ulrika. Of course, he refused.

"Ulrika disappeared from society. Then stories began to drift down from the hills of a 'white serpent' or the 'white queen' of a secret cult.

'And then'—Lantora paused and his face worked—"both my parents were brutally slain while I was in New Orleans on business—their throats torn out by human hands! Ulrika Bayne had accomplished her revenge.

"My search began. I acquainted myself with the demoniac rites of her devilish cult. Without her knowing, I allied myself with them, I learned all that Ulrika knew, thought I bargained my soul to do it.

But I do not regret having bargained. With your help I may send Ulrika Bayne's accursed soul to the nethermost cosmos from which it can never return, back to Hell from which it came tonight, but back forever!

"One night I set out alone for the mountains. I met her suddenly on a deeply shadowed trail. Before I could protect myself, she was at my throat. She left me for dead, but I did not die. I returned to Port-au-Prince to pursue my vengeance, surer of myself than ever. I followed her then from Haiti to New Orleans, where I found her and, as you doubtless know, shot her.

"But they did not allow me to burn her body. It was a terrible mistake on their part, but they knew no better and I could not convince them.

"So Ulrika eluded me a second time. But now she must not escape. She must die, and this time her body must be destroyed by fire. As long as Ulrika Bayne lives, I too must live. Only when she is dead may I find peace. And I want peace more than anything else in the world. I am tired—so tired."

The force of Lantora's weary but terrible hatred swept over us like a hot wind. Monica sat leaning forward, her lips pressed tightly together, her head raised, as if to catch every word Lantora might say. I opened my lips to thank Lantora for his intervention, but he broke in before I could speak.

"Do not thank me. We are strangers, and must always remain so. I protect you from the woman I hate because it is a blow struck at her."

"But what can we do?" asked Monica.

"There is a man in Chicago who may be able to help you—this same Bishop Peale of New Orleans, now connected to the staff of Cardinal Sanderson. Go to him tomorrow and mention Ulrika Bayne's name to him. Now I must go to Ulrika."

I remembered abruptly the low, commanding tone he had used in addressing Ulrika Bayne when he had first entered, and its strange effect on her. I remembered her frustrated, bitter cry "Gabriel! Gabriel! Ah, wretched man!" What power did Lantora hold over that malignant entity from outside?



'Good night,' said Lantora, and slipped quietly out the way he had come.

Into the silence left by his departure came the jangling ring of the doorbell. I answered it. Opening the door, an exclamation escaped me. Two uniformed men stood there. The police!

"Is Monica Crittendon here?" asked one

There was no need for me to speak; Monica stood behind me.

"I am Monica Crittendon," she said.

'Did you see anyone come out of here?' I broke in excitedly.

They looked at me, puzzled. "No. No one."

Monica's arrest threw into me a desire for immediate action. I sought out Bishop Peale. I roused him out of bed, told him as much as I knew.

He was a kindly old man in his late sixties, his hair graying, his eyes hard and sharp behind pince-nez. He recalled Lantora at once. He also recalled seeing Ulrika fall, fatally wounded. He was much agitated at what I said about the manner of Commissioner Allen's death. But he repeated several times that Ulrika Bayne was dead. Nevertheless each time his voice was a little less certain. He said he couldn't understand why Lantora had sent me to him, unless it was to gain some additional knowledge of Voodooism.

"Damballah, the serpent god, demands blood and ghastly sacrifice," he said, speaking of the *culte des morts*. "There are a great many curious beliefs connected with cults like these. The animation of corpses is a phase of the ritual of the *culte des morts* and the existence of an astral entity apart from the psychical self is also firmly believed in.

'In my own experience in New Orleans I have come up against more than one inexplicable and disturbing evidence of supernatural power. We are forced inevitably to a definite conclusion—there are two realms beyond this life, the good and the evil, each represented by its forces, forces still at war. Yes, the powers of the *culte des morts* are real and difficult to fight. If I can help, though I don't see how, I'll be more than willing.'

The whirr of the telephone bell interrupted him. He took up the instrument, spoke, handed it to me. 'For you.'

"Hello, Carter?" I recognized Lantora's low voice at once. "A Captain Smithson, aide to Commissioner Allen, who had a good deal of information though known to Allen alone, promised the papers a statement for the morning edition. He never got the chance. He was found dead in the hall between his office and the conference room. His throat had been torn out, and a woman, cloaked in black, was seen by three witnesses and described as *floating* down the stairs immediately after the murder. Ask Bishop Peale to stand by, and I shall want to see you at your home tonight. Matters will come to a head soon."

I replaced the telephone before remembering that Lantora knew nothing of Monica's arrest. I wanted him to know; so I asked Bishop Peale to trace the call. The bishop pushed a bell on his table and almost at once his secretary came into the room from an adjoining one.

"Will you trace the telephone call that was just put through to me?"

For a moment the secretary hesitated in surprise. Then he said, "There has been no call put through for the last hour!"

The bishop smiled and said, "Someone has made a mistake."

I remembered the lights dimming before Ulrika Bayne's presence. Did Gabriel possess a similar, or perhaps even greater, power over electrical devices, in this case the telephone—so that he had managed, by some remote and mystical control, to get through to the Bishop's own phone without the necessity of a relay from the secretary?

An hour later, as dawn was breaking, I hurried to the police station where Monica Crittendon was being detained. As I hastened, Lantora's strange words kept coming back. "I shot her at last. I wanted them to burn her body. They refused. That was a terrible mistake."

He had shot her in the presence of twenty-odd people, and yet she was not dead. Could it be that the improbable thing mentioned in the official accounts from New Orleans was the truth?

I recalled the words: "There is also a strong belief current among the Negroes that it is impossible ever to kill any member of the sect, for they have weird rites which they employ to raise the bodies from the dead. But these bodies, Lantora claimed, were never fully alive,

being used only as stations for the astral to return to " Could it be, then, that Ulrika Bayne was dead, and *yet terribly, maddeningly alive?*

I saw Monica as soon as I entered the station. She was dressed to leave, and came up to me at once "I've been released," she said. "Two clerks at the office saw the commissioner alive at his desk as I was drawing the door shut behind me when I left his office just before his death. Besides, Smithson's murder, of which you know by this time, rather lets me out, since I was safely locked up when it happened "

That was that I took Monica home with me Harriet took charge of her, put her to bed.

It was eight o'clock when I went to the library A few minutes later Takati, my general factotum who had the previous night off, ushered in Lantora. He entered quickly with an abrupt greeting and dropped into a chair, beginning to talk at once.

"Much has happened," he said "I have tracked Ulrika to her hiding place!"

I came to my feet.

"Be calm," he said, though he himself was not calm "Yes, I have found her. I have discovered the *houmfort* the Mystery Temple where she presides over the Voodoo ritual and holds her meetings with those whom she has enlisted in her hellish cult of death She is in a building on Wabash Avenue, in a squalid Negro district."

"How did you find her?"

"That does not matter," he replied "What is important is that we must go there quickly Certainly I must go, and you must come with me. I have been trying in vain to discover the burial place of Ulrika Bayne's body I think that it is here in Chicago She has had it brought from New Orleans, so that she could rest more easily in the neighborhood of her activities."

He was speaking calmly, precisely, dispassionately, as though the amazing information he was imparting was of the stuff of ordinary conversation, something of everyday interest. But its effect on me was not calming.

"Surely we can do nothing until we know where her body lies?" I cried.

'That is why we must go to the *boumfort*! We must face Ulrika. We must force her to tell us where her body is buried. We can delay no longer. Are you going with me, or not?'

I thought of Monica, hesitated, and in that moment my question was answered for me. A woman's piercing scream split the silence of the house. It was repeated, a chilling cry of terror, from upstairs, from the rooms where Monica and Harriet were!

"Monica!" I shouted. "Harriet!"

I sped from the room and pounded up the stairs. Silence had fallen, silence more frightening than the screams of a moment ago. I ran down the upper hall. I threw one door open, that of the guest room; the room was empty, the bed undisturbed. Then I flung myself across the hall, upon the door of Harriet's room. It opened under the weight of my body and I went sprawling into the room.

Harriet lay on the floor before me. A hasty examination convinced me that though her hair was disheveled and her clothing disarranged, she herself was unhurt, and was recovering from her faint even as I bent anxiously above her. But there was no sign of Monica in the room.

She was gone! The wind-swung curtains from the open window over the veranda roof gave mute evidence of the road that had been taken.

"Monica," Harriet murmured. "They took her."

"Who was it?" I demanded, furious with myself for letting Monica alone even for a moment.

"A Woman, and two Negroes."

"Lantora!" I called.

He was standing in the doorway.

"Monica's gone. They've taken her. Ulrika and her Negroes," I said rapidly. "For God's sake, man, help me find her!"

He nodded abruptly, said, "Come quickly then," and went rapidly from the room.

In a moment we were running across the lawn toward my car, still standing on the drive where I had left it.

Behind us, Takati appeared suddenly in the doorway, calling, "Mr. Henry, Mr. Henry!"

I turned impatiently. Even at that moment Monica might be dead



her white throat torn—ghastly thought! "No time now, Takati," I flung back.

"The telephone," he shouted.

I paused. Perhaps Monica might already have escaped them? Vain hope! "Who it it?"

"A man named Peale."

"Ask him to call in two hours." Then another thought came to me. "What's that address?" I asked, turning to Lantora.

"4777 South Wabash."

"Tell him to meet me at 4777 South Wabash! Tell him there's no time to lose!"

Driving more intently, more furiously, with greater purpose than I had ever driven before, I made my way into the city, across it, and into the most squalid section of Chicago's south side. The dark streets, dirty and narrow, were lit only by occasional dim lamps that seemed to lean perilously out into the road on their posts.

Lantora seized my arm. "Slow down and take the next corner to the right."

The machine lurched into a side street, going more slowly now.

"At the end of the block."

Obediently I drove forward and drew toward the curb when Lantora spoke again. "Not here. Turn the corner again, left, and park the car in the alley."

I did as he directed and we found ourselves in a narrow, filthy little alley behind a group of rotting sheds and buildings.

"So," said Lantora, getting out of the car. "Come now."

We made our way through evil smelling passages, through dark little courts lined by squalid and odorous shacks, until we came at last to a door half-hidden in the darkness. There was no one near, no one in sight.

"Step aside," whispered Lantora.

I did as he ordered, crouching in the shadows that haunted the doorway. Lantora knocked, three times, paused then once again. The door creaked a little, opened a tiny way.

"Who?" asked a deep, muffled voice.

Lantora said something that sounded like Chinese evidently the password to the place. The door swung back. The man in the dark corridor beyond shuffled aside, grunting something in dialect.

Lantora went ahead and I followed. The door closed behind us and the keeper came forward. At that moment Lantora lunged back and something struck the doorkeeper's head with a dull crunching thud. I felt his bulky form sagging forward. Lantora caught it easily, lowering it gently to the floor. Then he rolled the body over to one wall. Astral or human, Lantora had not forgotten his police technique.

From some distant place in the building came the steady rhythmic beating of drums—*boom, boom, boom*—over and over—and above it, under it, running through it—the eerie chanting of human voices in chorus.

‘That will lead us,’ Lantora whispered, ‘Come.’

Although we were in darkness, Lantora seemed to know precisely where he was going, it was as if he had often made his way in the devious passages that honeycombed the cellars of this deserted building.

The sound of the drums and of the chanting voices grew louder. Abruptly we came to a steep flight of stairs. We went deep into the earth. The air became dank. Suddenly we emerged into a dimly lit corridor, both ends of which were lost in darkness.

But Lantora never paused. I kept my hand on his shoulder. The end of the corridor toward which we were moving came at last out of the darkness, and I saw a heavy black curtain suspended across the passage-way. From beneath it came a very faint line of light, reflected, it seemed, from very far beyond the curtain.

I knew, with a sharp thrill, that we were on the threshold of the meeting chamber of the *culte des morts*. We were about to enter the holy of holies of Voodoo worship. The rhythmic beating of the drums had reached a loud and steady boom, the voices of the chanters had risen to a high frenzy. The ritual of the Serpent-God Damballah was in full sway.

Lantora pulled the curtain slightly to one side, and I looked furtively into the room beyond. It was an underground cavern, bare of furnishings except for a long table at the farther end, this evidently served as a

sort of altar, for it was covered by a heavy red cloth, on which lay what appeared to be a human skull, together with three large copper bowls, gleaming in the flickering of tall black tapers that stood on the floor around the table.

The tapers provided the only light in the underground meeting chamber. Directly behind the altar stood a mock cross, painted in black and red and tufted with feathers. Around this cross, painted in black and red also, was wreathed a wooden snake, its head rearing up at the top, its glassy eyes shining with striking realism in the dim light.

The cavern walls were hung in red cloth on which were painted great black figures, one of which was clearly a copy of the death *ouanga* now so familiar to me. There were also innumerable reptiles drawn on the cloth, and one huge half-reptile, half-man, which was evidently a primitive artist's crude conception of the god Damballah.

The huge, weirdly decorated cavern was filled with humans. Huddled on the floor, crowded down toward the makeshift altar, were Negroes. Some were on their knees, some squatting. All were chanting, their faces turned toward the *mamalo*. -Ulrika Bayne, the woman we sought!

She stood before that frenzied crowd, clothed only in a blood-red cloth draped over one shoulder and down across her body, swaying to the chant that arose, magnificent and terrible, her eyes like black fire, her mouth a startling crimson, half open in song. Beyond her, in the darkness, crouched three drummers. The chant was, surprisingly, in English.

Damballah, Ouede, Damballah,  
The hour has come for blood.  
The hour for sacrifice has come.  
Damballah, Ouede, Damballah.

Ulrika suddenly moved backward and cast several rapid glances over her shoulder, as if to assure herself of someone's presence. Abruptly, with a sharp upward gesture, she stopped the chanting, the queer song dying on the lips of the singers as if by magic. All the faces in the cavern were turned to her with a peculiar rapture and intensity.

Ulrika turned slowly, made a sign to someone beyond the curtains hung behind the altar. Two Negroes appeared dragging between them a terror-stricken goat, whose frantic bleatings sounded unnaturally loud in

the sudden stillness that had fallen upon the worshipers. The goat was brought to where Ulrika stood majestically erect.

She took hold of the animal as the Negroes released it. She managed, despite its frenetic struggles, to hold the animal with one hand, while with the other she signed for the throng to take up the chant again. Once more the drums began to beat, the Negroes to sing. But now the rhythm was changed -it was faster, madder, and the words were no longer distinguishable.

Ulrika came slowly to her knees, releasing the goat, which now made no effort to move, and faced the animal, whose great wide eyes were fixed upon her own in pitiful fright. Then abruptly she reached to one side, took up a gleaming knife, and plunged in deeply into the animal's throat.

The Negroes beyond the altar at once ran forward with bowls, one of which she took impatiently from them and held to catch the blood which gushed from the wound. The bowl filled quickly, and she took a second from the Negroes. A third was partially filled before the blood ceased flowing and the goat was allowed to fall in death.

The voices of the worshipers had now risen to screaming intensity. The *mamalo* joined in the song, screaming as loudly as those who crouched before the altar, so that her voice reached us distinctly. She emptied the bowl of blood on the cross in a single, sweeping gesture. Quickly taking up the second bowl, she passed it down to the kneeling audience, who began to drink of the still warm blood.

The blood maddened them. They dipped their hands into it, smeared it over each other and upon their own bodies. The chanting, meanwhile, never lessened.

But at last, as we watched with fascinated horror, it died down to a soft moaning song. The Negroes looked eagerly toward the swaying figure of Ulrika Bayne. It was apparent that they were waiting for something more, and it was then that Ulrika motioned a second time to someone behind the curtains beyond the altar.

Lantora bent toward me, murmuring, "Whatever you see, don't stir. Wait until I move."

It was fortunate that he warned me, for when the curtains near the



altar were thrust aside, I felt as though death itself had come up in my throat. Monica, white and drawn, was pushed forward into the small space between curtains and altar. Ulrika Bayne leaned forward, leering. Lantora's fingers gripped my biceps, re-inforced his warning.

Very slowly Monica came forward. She was beautiful as she moved in the half-light, her white face making her eyes dark pools, her body erect, her tight mouth red as Ulrika's. But she moved as if under a kind of hypnosis—stiffly, uncertainly—toward the altar—and the knife!

Then the music began again—the slow beating of drums, the chanting of the worshipers, this time in a lower key and with different words—words fraught with horror!

Damballah, Ouede  
Blood-Lover, Damballah,  
We have the Sacrifice,  
She stands before us  
Ready for the knife.  
Damballah, Ouede, Damballah,  
Look down upon us  
And drink the blood  
Soon to flow.

The subdued intensity of their words was not lost to us. There was a horrific suggestion of terrible waiting, waiting—and beneath, a dormant triumph ready to burst out at the sacrifice—the awful sacrifice that Lantora must prevent. I felt myself grow rigid with anger and impotence.

Still Lantora's fingers, mute but eloquent, kept me where I was. In my inaction I died a thousand deaths—but Lantora held me, not by physical force, but by the strength that had been in his warning to make no move until he gave the sign.

Monica stood facing Ulrika.

Swiftly Ulrika bent forward. I felt Lantora's hand on my mouth, stifling my involuntary cry. But Ulrika had merely given a verbal command. Monica slowly raised her head, exposing her white throat.

Then Ulrika bent for the knife, which she had dropped after the sacrifice of the goat. She stepped close to Monica. I turned a frantic face to Lantora.

Abruptly he pushed past me, thrust the curtains aside, strode forward into the room!

"Ulrika Bayne!" he intoned in a loud commanding voice.

A dead silence fell upon the worshipers. Ulrika turned slowly, uncertainly. As Monica had bent before Ulrika Bayne's will only a moment before, so now she seemed to be bending, before the will reflected in Lantora's voice. Then she saw as well as heard him!

"Gabriel!" she screamed in a kind of animal anguish, and her knife clattered to the floor.

Lantora launched himself forward.

Panic broke among the Negroes.

Believing without a moment's doubt that police had discovered their secret place of worship they rose with frightened shouts. Some rushed for the door to the outside. The rest, still under the influence of their demoniac ritual, still half crazed from the blood sacrifice that had been made to Damballah and the human sacrifice that had been about to take place, became like stampeding cattle locking horns in a terror-stricken attempt to escape out of a cul-de-sac. Like western horsemen, we drove our way through, the solid banks of flesh melting and flowing away on either side of us.

Monica, dear girl, saw me, recognized me. Lantora's command had released her from Ulrika's spell, and she came running from the blood-stained altar across the room to me. Behind her Ulrika Bayne stood, her eyes fixed upon Lantora, closing in upon her.

Monica fell into my arms, sobbing her relief. Over her shoulder I saw Ulrika Bayne, the *mamaloï*, facing Lantora, her face ashen, her eyes burning with malefic hate, yet frustrated and powerless. She beheld in Lantora her bitterest enemy, the only person who could do her fatal injury, and she could do nothing. Held by a spell more powerful than her own, her jaws were set, her face contorted by a terrific straining of her will. And then, jerking her head suddenly up, she freed herself from the spell!

She swung around with lightning-like rapidity, picked up the knife she had dropped in her first terror. I was about to let Monica go, to

dash to Lantora's aid. Would he fail now? After all his patience, all his striving? But in Lantora's face was neither dismay nor fear. His lips were set in a grim smile. I knew that the spirit within that solidly built body was cold and calm.

Suddenly, with a shriek, Ulrika Bayne flung herself away from Lantora and ran toward the doorway through which we had entered.

Lantora turned leisurely, with maddening slowness, watching her. Then he called again. "Ulrika —stop!"

Ulrika stumbled, hesitated in her flight, half-turned. She strove visibly to move forward. She could not. She was rooted to the spot and could turn only to face Lantora once more.

"Not yet, Ulrika," said Gabriel Lantora, his voice softer now, more insinuating, yet with a whiplash quality.

She strove with all her will against Lantora, her body writhing in impotent anger and despair, but she could not move. The last of the Negroes was gone now, and the sound of their swiftly running feet drifted down to us from above. Otherwise stillness reigned. Ulrika flung her body from side to side, eager to escape, yet knowing she could not.

Lantora spoke again, this time in a low, sibilant, compelling voice. "No, Ulrika, escape is not for you. Not until I have done with you at last. And then there will be no far place for you to go."

"Gabriel!" she screamed. "Unite with me! We shall rule, you and I!"

Lantora smiled, but in his smile there was terrible hatred, indomitable will. Then for the first time he laughed, his laughter slashing at the woman.

"Wretched man!" she cried out. "Wretched man — may Damballah strike you dead!"

I knew at last what I was seeing in this unholy temple of dark mysteries — a duel of hate-fraught wills — Ulrika Bayne and Gabriel Lantora — enemies in Life and Death and beyond Death, enemies in the infinite reaches of the spirit, now acting out their demoniac battle in this blood-bathed cave below deserted and squalid Chicago streets!

Suddenly I swung around, tense, my fists clenched, ready to lash out

Bishop Peale stood there, dressed soberly in a dark traveling suit. Behind him, in the shadows, stood his chauffeur and Takati.

"Good evening, Carter," he said jerkily, an undercurrent of suppressed excitement in his voice. "I thought I might be of use, and besides, have discovered something I came on here, and your Japanese was helpful in finding you." He looked inquiringly beyond, his face paling suddenly at sight of Ulrika Bayne.

"Lantora is forcing her to tell where her body is hidden," I whispered. Lantora had taken a slow step forward. Bishop Peale shuddered. "This is unholy, evil," he whispered.

Lantora began to speak, his tones softly sinister. "Come forward, Ulrika. Come to me."

She was powerless in ignore, helpless to fight.

She writhed before him, struggled against his will, but was drawn inexorably toward him. "Gabriel, Gabriel!" she gasped.

"Come, Ulrika," he almost whispered. He extended his arms, went slowly to meet her as she came to meet him. And the woman who was dead yet terribly alive, the woman whose power was absolute except for that of Gabriel Lantora, cringed before him, sinking to the ground. She knelt, her eyes wide with fear. She crouched lower as he bent above her. She slid to the floor with a sobbing cry, her body outstretched before Lantora, her hands touching his feet in an agony of terrible fear. "Gabriel, Gabriel, Gabriel—" she moaned, shuddering.

"Rise, Ulrika," commanded Lantora.

She moaned, but did not move.

His voice grew more firm. "Rise, Ulrika."

Still the woman did not move. She began to whimper, her voice like a child's crying. Then she cried out, "No, no, no, Gabriel—I cannot."

Lantora bent low over the woman, speaking very slowly, firmly. "Rise, Ulrika Bayne, and face me. Look into my eyes. You know Lantora. He loved you once, but he hates you now. Rise. Face me."

Monica gripped my arm convulsively at this revelation that Lantora had once loved the woman who now groveled before him. Bishop Peale was watching, his face drained of blood.

Then, with a snake-like grace, Ulrika lifted her head and shoulders



from the floor, lifted her body on her hands. The red robe which she wore slipped from her body, and her flesh gleamed with a deathly pallor in the flickering glow of the fast dying candlelight from around the altar.

"Rise!" demanded Lantora again.

She came slowly to her knees.

"Look into my eyes!"

Her head moved upward almost visibly against her will, and she looked into the face of her tormentor. Then her eyes flashed once more in defiance and hatred, her mouth opened and her lips twisted as if to speak—but no sound came.

"Up," ordered Lantora grimly.

She came to her feet with a writhing motion, leaning against the altar, bending away from him. Abject fear again came into her face. We could see Lantora's face only in profile now, but the stern line of his set jaw, the locked expression of his face, showed the intensity with which he fought against the thing before him.

And now his voice became terrible.

*"Ulrika, where have you hidden your body?"*

Ulrika Bayne did not reply. She was leaning as far back from Lantora as possible, her back arched across the makeshift altar, braced by her back-flung arms. Her face was twisted by despair and furious hatred.

"Ulrika, where have you hidden your body?"

"Gabriel, Gabriel —" It was the wail of a lost soul, echoing in the tense silence.

"You have taken it from New Orleans," Lantora went on, lowering his face toward her. "Where have you put it?"

Like a serpent rearing, Ulrika stood erect. Her face was thrust near to Lantora's, and it was vile in its white loathing and malevolence. "No, Gabriel. That I shall never tell. Never." She broke into horrible, jarring laughter that sent shudders through Monica and me.

Lantora spoke again, no longer in English—a torrent of words rushed from his lips. Their effect on Ulrika was instantaneous. She shuddered violently, swayed, crumpled soundlessly to the floor. She lay sprawled at

Lantora's feet, crushed and beaten, long shuddering sobs racking her body.

"Where, Ulrika?" he asked, bending over her

"In a graveyard near Hubbard's Woods" Ulrika's voice came chokingly, muffled.

"Its name, Ulrika?"

"Gatewood's Cemetery."

"How do we get there?"

"I don't know. I never go by the road."

Behind me, the bishop came suddenly to life. "I know, Lantora," he called in an unsteady voice "The Lake road—north."

Lantora looked up, for the first time aware of Bishop Peale's presence. His lips twisted into a sardonic smile, but his eyes flashed a welcome. "Go quickly, all of you. Ulrika and I will be there when you arrive. We must finish the work Bishop Peale prevented in New Orleans!"

We drove at breakneck speed to Hubbard's Woods, the five of us—Bishop Peale, his chauffeur, Takati, Monica and I—and then to the cemetery, an old, abandoned graveyard on a side road, marked by a crumbling stone wall, half overgrown with shrubbery and tall, uncut grass, with close-pressing trees lending an eerie atmosphere to its desertion, its white slabs gleaming through the open gateway in the pale moonlight.

There was no one at the gate. Could something have happened to Lantora and Ulrika Bayne? But no—there they were suddenly, Lantora and the cowering woman, clothed again in her red robe, standing not far from the gate, waiting beside a grave that had no marker. There were two spades lying significantly on the grave.

I shuddered as I saw the *mamaloï's* blanched face in the moonlight and the demoniac glow that face shed forth. Monica, who had insisted upon coming with us rather than wait in the car, trembled and looked away.

"Let the grave be opened at once," said Lantora, stepping to one side."

Takati and the bishop's chauffeur got to work immediately. The grave was fortunately a very shallow one, not two feet deep, and the coffin

had obviously been placed near the surface in case it became necessary to move it at short notice. In a few minutes the earth had been cleared away. The bishop and I stepped forward to help lift the coffin. There it stood at last, its silver ornaments so dulled with age that there was no gleam in the moonlight. It was, I saw with satisfaction, of rather plain wood, and stood, a dark, dirt covered mass, on the ground.

"Perhaps those two had better go now," suggested Lantora of the bishop's chauffeur and Takati, whom we sent immediately to drive the car down the road and wait for us there.

Ulrika Bayne moved restlessly in the shadows, seeming to merge with them, her hands blindly flailing the air. She was inescapably trapped and knew it. Lantora called next for brushwood and dry grass. We gathered it. There came a sudden quick movement from the *manaloi's* shadowy being. I saw it and shouted a warning. But I was too late. Ulrika Bayne's hands were at Lantora's throat. A picture of Commissioner Allen, as he must have looked in his office after his murder, flashed through my mind—a horrific picture of the man with his throat torn out. I stumbled forward.

But my fright was needless. Lantora calmly flung Ulrika from him, holding her in his grip. "Poor Ulrika," he murmured. "Have you not yet learned that you can injure me no more?"

He turned to me. "Give me the match, or your cigarette lighter. It must be my hand that does this.

He struck a match on the box I extended, and touched it to the dried grass around the coffin. A blue flame sprang up, wavered uncertainly in the wind, and flared. Ulrika shrieked as if she had been stabbed. "Gabriel!" she cried in a piercing voice.

At a motion from Lantora, the three of us backed away. The flames grew and spread greedily. Fanned by the wind they leaped up, encircled the coffin, and a weird reflection fell on the faces of Lantora and Ulrika Bayne.

Behind me Bishop Peale was murmuring a prayer.

Ulrika began to flutter about the fire. She ran in little circles around the burning pile, calling out in a terrible voice, wringing her pale hands. As she ran, the red robe dropped from her.

Suddenly she stopped. Above the crackling of the flames came a rhythmic beating of drums, sounding from a distance at first, then slowly growing louder and stronger, the same rhythm we had heard in the *boumfort* on South Wabash Avenue, the sound that sprang from the terror-shrouded hills of Haiti. *Boom boom boom* the sound rang out into the night, wavering in the wind, trembling, growing. As the flames spread, the sound came louder, and presently there was a terrific booming of tom-toms in our ears. And then came the chanting—a wailing chrous that grew in the night above the sound of the drums.

As the beating of the tom-toms grew in strength, as the wailing chant swelled into the night, so, too, did Ulrika Bayne's cries mount in power. We were seeing, hearing the impossible, yet it was true! Those flames, consuming the coffin and the body in it, were also consuming Ulrika Bayne's fragmentary mortality.

Abruptly she ceased her wailing.

For a moment she stood rooted, then slowly she advanced to the edge of the pyre, and on into the flames. She wavered, turned and gave one look back at Lantora, the man who had once loved her. Then she seemed to be drawn down into the now almost consumed body—and a tired wail came drifting up into the silent night.

Lantora's shoulders sagged. "She is dead," he said softly. "I am avenged and may rest. Good-by. Forget all that has passed."

He drew back into the shadowy trees, faded into the night.

"Lantora!" I called.

But Lantora was gone.

I felt a hand on my arm. It was Bishop Peale.

"I told you," he said, in a voice that shook, "that I had discovered something. I cabled Haiti about Lantora. I got my answer. Lantora was killed by Ulrika Bayne on a deserted mountain pass almost twenty-five years ago, but he had already gained the secrets she was to use after her body's death in New Orleans. Therein lay his power. May both of them rest in peace. He told us to forget. Let us try."

The dying flames crackled and sputtered, and Monica, trembling at my side, pointed the way to forgetting.



## *The Horror from the Depths*

Professor Jordan Holmes is dead, and the story of the incredible horror that threatened Chicago in the spring of 1931 can be told at last.

In that spring, the reclamation of land from Lake Michigan for the coming World's Fair was already well under way, when the first of those inexplicable events took place. It was an occurrence essentially prosaic, yet fraught with untold horror, as all of us at work on the project on the lake shore were soon to learn.

Late one March afternoon, one of the enormous dredges brought up from the lake bottom what was undoubtedly a portion of some long-dead animal's limb in a remarkable state of preservation. It was a sort of fossil, and yet seemingly not possessed of the consistency of a fossil. John Tennant, the chief engineer, was summoned, his interest aroused, and he in turn called upon Professor Jordan Holmes of the Field Museum for assistance in identifying the curious discovery from the lake. Confident that Holmes would know to what animal the fragment belonged, Tennant and I anticipated his arrival.

But Holmes' surprise at sight of the fossil was equalled only by his bewilderment.

"The thing's boneless," he said at once, "and doesn't show any sign of ever having had bone formation!" He examined it further. "And you'll notice that the limb is extraordinarily well preserved, hard only on the surface. The end severed by the dredge is strangely resilient, spongy!"

A close scrutiny revealed yet another odd fact. The creature evidently had had no blood at any time in its existence, unless the odd greenish-

black veins could be said to have carried something that served as blood. Holmes was utterly unable to venture a guess about the nature of the animal, and departed finally, taking the fossil with him for laboratory examination.

A second piece of this strange fossil was brought from the depths on the following morning. This bore no resemblance to any portion of animal anatomy either Tennant or I had ever seen. It was oddly round, its surface broken by horny ridges and bumps, and at one end there showed the same spongy resilience which had marked the first find. Except for the fact that it had no opening of any kind, it might by its shape have been a head.

Once more we called in Professor Holmes, who wished to take this second piece with him. Since it was bulky, Tennant sent me along.

It was in the cab, on the way to the museum, that we noticed the first slight change in our burden. The thing was dripping a dark greenish-black fluid to the floor of the taxi. Holmes at once turned the thing over and peered intently at the spongy severed end from which the fluid dropped.

"Seems to be coming from the veins," he murmured.

I bent closer. Here and there, where the veins had been cut cleanly by the jaws of the dredge, great drops of liquid formed and trickled down, leaving repulsive greenish-black traces. There was also a slight malodorous stench.

"Couldn't be water from the lake, dissolving some of spongy tissues?" I ventured.

"I hardly think so," Holmes replied, shaking his head. "This fluid seems to be the regular contents of those veins, and now that they're cut, it's naturally flowing away."

I voiced his own perplexing doubt.

"Then, if even the liquids in the animal are intact, the preservation is even more remarkable!"

He shook his head again, and made an abrupt motion with one hand.

"Very remarkable," he said shortly.

At the museum, I helped Holmes put it under a glass case with the

fossil we had discovered the day before. It was easily apparent that both parts came from the same kind of animal, if not the same one.

From that moment on, things began to happen. When I returned to my work from the museum, I had no intimation of the ghastly horror that was to shroud the city. It was on the following morning that the first manifestation of the horror occurred, though at that time there was nothing to suggest the frightful things that were to come. Holmes roused me from my sleep by calling me from the museum and excitedly asking me to come down.

I was astounded at the sight that he had called me to see. During the night, the horny structure, which encased the spongy mass of our fossil, had distinctly cracked. The head, which had been left lying on its side, now stood on its severed end, and at the base a wide crevice, narrowing down to a similar crack, had sprung open.

In the limb, too, a similar crack had appeared, though it was not as large as that on the other fossil. Beneath could now clearly be seen the glistening green body of the creature.

But what was most remarkable was the discovery I made, when, at Holmes' urgent suggestion, I examined the fossils more closely. Then I saw tiny, fingerlike tendrils of flesh which had sprung into being in the base of the head where the horny outer covering had cracked!

Holmes rapidly explained his astonishment at finding this inexplicable change, murmuring something vague about atmospheric conditions bringing it about. Then he suggested that we watch the thing, to see whether any farther change might set in during the day as they had during the night.

Whatever we had expected to see, we were disappointed. Though we sat quietly throughout the morning with our eyes fixed upon those strange fossils, there was nothing to reward our interest. And when we finally went out to lunch, both of us were not only definitely crestfallen, but not a little perplexed.

But our astonishment upon our return from lunch that noon was infinitely greater than our first surprise of the morning, for what we saw brought home to both of us, with unpleasant suddenness, a startling fact. During the previous night, when there was no one to observe

them, the fossils had mysteriously changed, but when we watched that morning, nothing had taken place. And yet, during the lunch hour, when there had been no one to watch, the fossils had changed again!

Where the fleshlike tendrils had at first been small, thin, underdeveloped, and occasional, they now covered the entire base of the head structure. Now they were materially larger and heavier, having assumed now the actual proportions of fingers. But when we approached the case, despite this apparent change, the tendrils hung there limp and still, and the fossils were as immobile as ever. It was only later that we noticed that the green bulge of glistening flesh beneath the fissure was greater, and had taken on a richer color.

I think that what both Holmes and I desired to avoid was the admission, even to ourselves, that this long-buried thing might still have life. So even after our return that noon, we continued to entertain the theory that perhaps atmospheric change was bringing about the phenomena.

At five o'clock, both of us were convinced that our theory of slow development was erroneous, for the fossils were precisely as they had been at our return from lunch. They occupied the same amount of space in the glass, the tendrils hung as limply as ever at the base, and the fissure had not moved beyond the little ridge topping the horny surface where we had noted it that noon.

"It's as if it knows we are watching, and could understand," said Holmes, laughing a little.

His laugh was not reassuring. He had voiced my own thought.

It was as if he said, "The thing has life, intelligence!"

I could not smile with him, for the suggestion carried with it an unaccountably chilling fear.

Holmes gave up at last. Shortly after six o'clock, he looked at me, a ghost of a smile lurking on his lips.

"Hungry?"

I nodded.

"I'm both hungry and tired. I think we'd better give it up for the time being and get food and sleep. Tomorrow I'll call in Jameson of



Chicago University and Morrison from Northwestern. They may be able to suggest something."

"And this?" I asked. "Are you leaving it alone all night?"

He looked at me for a moment without replying. "Don't be too surprised at what you see in this building, Sharp," he said. "A good many strange things happen here. As for this strange and weird, I'll admit, but nothing to worry over. I'll tell one of the guards to come through here occasionally during the night. If anything unusual happens, he'll call me."

That night the horror struck for the first time. I knew, from the moment that I heard Holmes' excited voice over the telephone, shortly after seven the next morning, that something highly out of the ordinary had occurred. Fortunately, I was already dressed and ready to go out when his call came, and was consequently waiting for him to pick me up in his car.

What he told me, as we sped toward the museum, was given to me in such an incoherent manner, that I cannot even attempt to reproduce it as I heard it from his lips.

Apparently there had been a telephone call from the museum sometime just before dawn. Holmes had been half asleep, had not gathered exactly what some incoherent voice had said over the wire, and had gone back to sleep. Now that he was awake, he could remember someone screaming. But he could not say now whether this had been the fragment of a nightmare or semi-conscious reality. Yes, there had been horrible babbling sounds, and a sucking noise. Someone whistling, too, he thought. Then at six thirty, another guard had called him. Something had happened in the laboratories—something serious! Professor Holmes had better come down at once.

The car came to a sudden stop. Holmes and I jumped quickly from it, mounted the steps, and ran down the corridors to the laboratory where the fossil remains were. Together, we burst through the already opened door of the laboratory—then halted abruptly.

There, on the floor near the open door, lay the guard, his legs twisted out of all human shape, his arms crushed under his body, his face fixed

horribly in an expression of awful fear. It needed no examination to know that he was dead.

Then I saw what I had tried to believe on my way down that I might not see—the broken glass on the floor near the body, and a little way away, dark green pieces of a horny shell.

Holmes saw them, too. He started at them for a moment, wild-eyed. Then he looked at me.

To myself, I had already admitted the possibility of our fossil's having life, but I had not anticipated malignance. But now, in the awful moments that we stood there in the laboratory, between the dead body of the guard and the fragments of glass and shell on the floor, we knew.

Running footsteps broke the spell of horror that held us. A moment later, another guard burst into the room, coming up short at sight of us.

"I've just called the police," he said.

"Better call the coroner, too," answered Holmes curtly.

As the guard left the room, Holmes turned to me.

"We can't hide it any longer, Sharp. That thing had life, intelligence, small though it was. Light and heat are all it needs to develop. It played dead under observation. With us gone for the night, it swelled to the case's capacity, broke the glass, thrust the shell aside, crept from the case. It expanded rapidly, developing a great, crushing power. When the guard came, it killed him, mangled him. Then this thing, an unknown being with a living intelligence—this thing *escaped!*"

"Then —"

But Holmes silenced me with a curt gesture. On the threshold of the room stood a policeman.

When the body of the unfortunate guard had been removed and the debris of glass and shell cleared away, we went into consultation. Dr. Jameson and Professor Morrison, both noted anthropologists, had arrived, and, as best we could, Holmes and I explained to them precisely what had happened as we understood it.

It was at the conclusion of this explanation, when it had been made apparent that the thing which had escaped must be apprehended at all

costs, that we first realized how we were hampered by our lack of knowledge.

What, if anything, did we know of the thing? That must first be determined. We began to set down the little information we had.

Certain salient facts confronted us. Evidently the thing had been at the bottom of the lake for a long time. Even though it was now apparently alive, it had been dead for centuries as far as civilization was concerned.

It was obviously of an amphibian nature, and structurally resembled the amoeba, for apparently it could expand within itself, although the head fossil may have added to its growing body the limb portion which had been near.

From that evidence, it might be supposed that the creature did not have limbs by nature, but could at will put forth feelerlike appendages by means of which to move on land. The horny outer covering must have been the foreign material which had collected around the body in the lake, serving as a protective covering.

Holmes believed that its real outer skin was that green, glistening coat just under the protective shell. The body tissue was the spongy, boneless fleshlike material through which coursed a dark, ugly green-black fluid which must serve the creature for blood.

But what of those veins? And why had the fluid ceased to flow? If the fluid were the creature's life blood, then it must have had a good amount when it left the museum. And that meant that the veins must have closed where they had been cut!

Yet, most disturbing of the facts that seemed so obvious, was the agreement that was reached by the four of us. Though both pieces of the fossil were alive, only one piece had motivating force. And the peculiar growth habits of the dead fossil were conclusive proof of what none of us wished at first to mention—the thing had an intelligence!

Moreover, it had great strength and an inconceivable capacity for expanding and growing, for it must have been huge when it broke from the glass cage and attacked the guard. And apparently, it could grow with no other stimulation than heat and light.

Holmes looked up at last.

"Gentlemen, have you any scientific explanation?" he asked his colleagues.

"If there's a scientific explanation, Holmes, we're unaware of it," said Jameson.

I made an abrupt protest. "But there must be something!"

Three pairs of eyes settled on me. Holmes spoke.

"It's difficult for a scientist to admit that he can't explain something like this by his knowledge, Sharp. Yet we must admit that this thing's beyond our knowledge, is perhaps older than the beginning of our knowledge."

Whatever I might have said was broken off by the entrance of a group of reporters. Holmes made short work of them, carefully withholding any suggestion of the uncanny, and promising them any information which would come out at future investigations.

We left the museum shortly before noon, and despite our probings, we had arrived at nothing fundamental in the mystery of the weird lake creature. True, there had been mention by Dr. Jameson of some old, long forgotten books, and Holmes' consequent agreement to begin a search that afternoon in the museum library.

Jameson, who was somewhat more steeped in ancient lore than the others, had suggested several titles of works so obscure that I had never heard of them, and some of which Holmes himself did not know. If ancient books, scientific or not, could explain this thing upon which we had stumbled, this thing hitherto unknown to science or to any branch of human knowledge, there still remained some hope that the fear that was beginning to enshroud us might be cleared away.

We had already admitted that perhaps this creature might return!

We were destined to suffer yet another shock, for as we were coming down the museum's outer steps, we were greeted by a newsboy's raucous calling.

"Mysterious Murders Near Field Museum!"

Holmes stopped at the boy's side, his eyebrows drawn in a frown. He took a paper from him and read quickly down the column. I, too, bought a paper and with Jameson and Morrison at my side, read rapidly. There was an account of the guard's mysterious death, together with a



briet note about the disappearance of the fossil remains. It was, of course, a somewhat garbled report. But it was the latter half of the column that drew our attention:

The body of an unidentified man was found at about seven o'clock this morning in Grant Park. The discovery was made by Plainclothesman John Harbinger. The man had apparently been crushed to death, and must have been dead for some time, for the body was extraordinarily cold and rigid.

The victim had evidently been walking in the direction of the Fair Grounds when he was assaulted and killed. The body, which was found under a clump of trees, had, to all appearances, suffered in the same manner as that of the Museum guard. For some distance around the body, the grass had been trampled down, and there was evidence of a struggle, for in places clods of earth had been torn up.

It is believed that some wild animal was loose in the park, for near the spot and leading away from it, were great tracks, similar to the trappings of an elephant, but having no definite outline. They seem more like impressions made by rounded posts. These tracks were followed through the Fair Grounds, and disappeared into the lake.

I looked quickly up at Holmes, crushing the paper in my hand.

"The second!"

Holmes' face had gone white. At my words, he drew a deep breath. "It's gone back to the lake now," he said, "and will probably stay there."

The four of us started for the scene of the second murder, but we had barely left the terraced facade of the museum for the park lawns when we, too, saw the distinct tracks the paper had mentioned.

The marks were clear in the grass and soft ground. They were like great pads, pressed down by tremendous weight. And apparently there were two limbs. They must have been of such proportion and at the same time such formlessness that I realized more sharply than before that the creature that made them was like no other beast that had walked the earth within the memory of man.

We followed the tracks past the scene of the assault to where they

could plainly be seen leading into the water. The thing had returned to the place from whence our great dredge had brought it'

Each of us fervently hoped that it had gone back forever, largely because there had been growing in us the conviction that the beast from the depths was not fundamentally of earth, despite its earthly home at the bottom of the lake. And this hope dispelled in a measure that terrible sense of immediate and inexplicable danger which had so vividly obsessed us but a short time before.

That afternoon, for the first time in two days, I returned to the work from which I had been called by the mysterious happenings. As first assistant to Tennant, my position was at least one of semi-authority, and it had not been a difficult matter to gain my chief's consent to take a few days absence. It was a relief to get back to work, a relief to order men about, to work with something tangible, to feel again that one had some authority, some power, some control over a situation.

And there were times in that bright afternoon when I could hardly believe that what had just happened was reality, when I could only believe that the whole affair was an evil chimera without meaning.

How much better that it been a chimera!

At five o'clock, Holmes came for me as he had promised. We spent some time together. But it was not until dinner that night that I knew, from his attitude, that there was something he wanted to impart. Over our coffee, each with a good cigar, I finally spoke of the matter

"Something seems to be bothering you," I said. "Why not say it?"

He shrugged his shoulders jerkily.

"I don't like to open that business again," he said. "I want it closed—for good."

"The fossils, is it? You might as well tell me."

He needed no urging. In the afternoon, he had followed Jameson's suggestions and looked about in the museum library. That collection is famous for its work on archeology, anthropology, and everything even remotely connected with them. Consequently its shelves on folk lore, ancient and modern, are large. Holmes had no difficulty in finding the books which his colleague had named as possible sources of information regarding our fossil remains.

He had gone through several of the old volumes without much success. Here and there he had run across vague hints, suggestive sentences, and some of the volumes, vague paragraphs about mythology older than the universe, a strange mythology traceable to long, long dead aspects of ancient and elder Gods of Good and Evil.

It was not until he opened the frightful *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, that he discovered the key to the half-hinted mythology in the other books. And thus, he stumbled upon the lost and terrible legend of Hastur, the Unspeakable, upon evil as old as, older than the universe, upon those ancient genii of evil -Hastur, Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Lloigor, Zhar, and others. It was then that he had his first vague knowledge of the Elder Gods, the Ancient Ones, and of those others, mad genii of evil who inhabited outer space before the world was born. It was they who descended to ravage Earth and were vanquished by the Elder Gods, and banished to the bottom of the sea.

The accursed spawn of Cthulhu was sent into the sea, thrust deep into the caverns of a hidden and lost sea kingdom, the sunken land of R'lyeh. And there were other Evil Ones in this strange mythology, banished to the far forbidden places of the earth, and One, sent back into outer space.

It was in the *Necronomicon* that these long dead tales were brought together. From this book, Professor Holmes finally drew a consecutive and logical story of the age-long struggle between the forces of cosmic evil and the Elder Gods—the final defeat of the Evil Ones, and their ultimate banishment into the far corners of the earth.

Holmes went on for a long time over our table, piecing together those legends, building up for me briefly the whole dead mythology of a time before man roamed the earth. Our coffee grew cold. Our cigars burned down. And still he went on in his quiet, slightly agitated voice. Even then, I was too uncomprehending to see what connection this mythology could have with the facts we had faced.

At last he began the strange story he had read in the untitled confessions of Clithianus, telling of vague and terrible rumors that had spread across the earth in the time of man. There was a time, the monk told, when the accursed children of one such Evil One had escaped their

prison, had been called back to earth by the power of those black souls who still worshipped them, spawn of mad Cthulhu.

Frightful creatures roamed the earth, creatures neither beast nor man, spreading abroad a strange power that bred in the minds of men, making them give way to violence and lust, horrible perversions and sins that had not been known before. Wherever these frightful things appeared, killing and ravaging, crime and horror spread among men, and there was terror throughout the land.

It was as if the creatures threw about them a spell under which all men fell, and there was none able to resist. And yet the things had been vanquished at last, by a power from the Elder Gods wielded in the hands of men.

Not until the things had been sent deep beneath the waters of the earth, did the men who were still left return to the God they had known before. And never since, Clithanus wrote, has the earth been as fair as it was before the night things crept upon it this second time.

Holmes stopped when he had told me the legend of Clithanus, and looked at me as if he believed he had shown me the secret of life itself. Even then, I did not entirely comprehend, for there was apparently nothing in what he had just revealed that I could tie up with our recent experience. But abruptly it struck me.

"But a mythology so old that even the most learned don't know of it!" I protested. "It can't be! The tale of an ascetic, more like an allegory of some kind—but not based on fact, surely."

"Listen, Sharp," he cut in, "as a scientist, I have nothing to say on the matter. You'll remember that two of the country's most able scholars and scientists directed me to the books of which I've been telling you. There's nothing but this for me to believe—in the light of what we've seen here in Chicago." He shrugged. "It's true, I'm afraid. That thing, brought to life again unwittingly, back once more among men to work its horror —"

"Then thank God it's gone back!" I breathed, now comprehending what terrifying horror we had so narrowly escaped.

For a moment, Holmes said nothing. Then he looked away, shuddering a little.



"It's time to go," he said.

Holmes left me that night at about nine o'clock before my own door. I stood there a moment and watched his car swing out of sight, a little perplexed at the air of uncertainty about him. Then I went in, and began to tackle the work I'd let slide lately. There was a stack of mail to be looked through, and a good number of blueprints to check. But I had barely settled down at my desk, when the telephone rang at my elbow.

I took the instrument from its cradle.

"Mr. Sharp? This is Jackson, the nightwatch." The man's voice was agitated.

"What's up?"

"I've tried to get Mr. Tennant. He's out. Can you come?"

Damn the man, I thought.

"Something wrong?"

"I don't know exactly. But something's coming up out of the lake."

At that, I jerked up.

"What's that you said? Say that again."

"Something's coming out of the lake. I don't know what they are. Big, shadowy shapes, coming up out of the water—very big things. Can you come over? Should I call the police?"

For a fleeting moment, I felt that I should like to be in London, Vienna—anywhere but in Chicago.

"No, no," I said quickly. "Where are you? Where are you calling from?"

"Administration Building, sir."

"Wait for me!" I said, more agitated than the watchman himself. I ripped off my dressing gown, changed my shoes, slipped into my coat, and ran from my apartment into the street. I saw the light of a nearby cab, and without pausing, jumped into it.

"To the Fair Grounds. Quick!"

The driver made record time, and we were soon swinging off Michigan Avenue up the still rough, half-finished streets between the buildings under construction. The taxi stopped abruptly before the Administration Building. Without a word to the driver, I jumped out,

and ran up the lane toward the lake shore, where the first construction buildings for the House of Art already stood grouped in a little cluster.

Jackson's there, I thought insanely. But he was not. One after the other, I pulled open the doors, looking into the deserted shacks. I ran out on the terrace before the houses, looking wildly from side to side.

Then suddenly, to the north, I saw something. I think I cried out involuntarily. Far away, receding rapidly in the distance, I saw eight, ten, perhaps more giant figures limned grotesquely against the sky over the lake.

In a moment, they were gone, vanishing even as I looked. Then, in the night, from far away, there came suddenly a sharp scream of terror and of horrifying anguish.

Clapping my hands over my ears I ran forward again and was sent sprawling. I had fallen over something. I scrambled to my feet, looking briefly behind me, and came up short. I had fallen over a crumpled body. For a moment, I stood in frozen horror.

Then I dropped to my knees and bent over the body. It was the lifeless form of Jackson, the nightwatch, horribly mangled, crushed in a grip of superhuman power.

I turned him over. His face was awful to see. . . .

I had called a policeman whom I saw near the Administration Building, and paid my cabman. The officer came hurrying up. Somewhat incoherently, I explained what had happened, as far as I could gather from Jackson's telephone call.

What did I think was wrong? I had no idea. Something peculiar, certainly, or what could the man have meant by his babbling about shapes that he saw coming out of the water? Was he a drunkard? I didn't know, but perhaps he had been drinking—that seemed to be the only *logical* explanation for his delusions.

Had I seen anyone about when I arrived? No, no one nearby. I had, however, seen some figures disappear in the direction of Soldiers' Field. What were they like? I didn't know exactly. They were very large—might have been animals, apes, perhaps. The policeman looked at me as if he thought I might have been drinking.

Then he knelt down beside the body and examined Jackson. His shocked face, looking up at me suddenly, was upsetting.

"He's in awful shape," he said, eyeing me suspiciously.

I agreed and suggested that he call an ambulance from the Administration Building, while I called Holmes at the same time. . . .

Holmes' car swung around the curve and drew up at the foot of the steps behind the ambulance just when the police had finished questioning me. Holmes came running up the steps and along the terrace. By that time, the police were already taking the body down on a stretcher, followed by a fussy coroner. Holmes paused a moment as they passed him, looked apprehensively at the stretcher.

I answered his breathless questions with a quick account of what had taken place. Holmes looked at me in silence, but in his eyes I read the same thought that crowded horribly through my mind. The horror from the lake was not dead, would not be dead, until the same means which had once subdued it were used again! And now, there was no longer only one of the things. There were many! And these unearthly things had come trooping out of their age-old prison to go ravaging through the world!

"We've got to do something!" Holmes said hoarsely. "If there's a way to fight these creatures, and there must be, we must find it. And there's only one place to look—those old books."

In a little while, we were seated in the museum library, in a small room whose walls were covered with volumes of great age, the rarer items in the museum collection. Holmes drew down a ponderous volume, bound in old leather, torn in places, and very badly worn, and settled himself in a chair at the table in the corner of the room.

"Know Latin?" he shot at me.

"Fairly well."

"Then read this along with me," he said.

I pulled my chair up next to his and looked at the open book. It was the volume of unnamable confessions by the monk, Clithanus. Words fraught with ghastly suggestion leaped out at me from the faded pages.

I began to read where Holmes indicated I should. It was the story

of the return of the Evil Ones to earth, and the ruin they had worked. Luridly, the monk had painted the pictures of the unspeakable crime and lust with which the earth had been cursed. Then, more briefly, more vaguely, he told how holy men from the interior of Europe had driven these evil genii into the waters of the earth. The holy men had used the forces of the Elder Gods, the power of the Ancient Ones, which they had come upon in some manner.

The things had been scattered over the waters of the earth, but the most wicked of them had been buried in a place Clithanus did not know.

In a far country where I have not been. Here few have journeyed. The Evil Ones were gathered in the deep of night—for it is only in the night that they roam—and driven back down into the dim caverns beneath the seas in that land.

Holmes turned the page quickly, so that I could not finish it. But I started again at the top of the next heavy page.

held down by the power of the blessed stars laid out over the water in the form of one great star, the five points marking the directions of the earth and the secret place beyond the earth from which the things of Evil had first come, the holy ones meanwhile whispering the secret words, the words known only to them, translated by them into this language from the ancient gibberings in which the Elder Gods had given them the potent words.

Holmes reached suddenly for a pad of paper that lay nearby and hastily took down something his advancing eye had seen before I had. The secret words, perhaps! Eagerly, I watched his hand.

*Negotia Perambulant in Tenebris.* . . . Things walking in the darkness, things not of the earth, things belonging to the damned hosts of evil, get you down into the nameless kingdoms under the seas, get you down and remain, by the power of the five-pointed stars, blessed and sacred, made powerful by the Elder Gods who loathe the evil you work in all being. O, Elder Gods, from your impenetrable fastnesses, look down and confirm, extend your power once more. Go down, you Evil Ones, and remain forever in eternal darkness. Hosts of mad Cthulhu, spawn of unspeakable Hastur, loath



some brood of Yog Sothoth, get you down into everlasting sleep. Never again shall you rise upon the fair earth. Go, in the name of those Elder Gods, the Old Ones, whom once you sought to displace. Go now, and the power of the five-pointed star shall forever hold you below the face of the earth in the hidden and lost sea kingdoms of the vast unknown!

Holmes looked up suddenly.

"Finished?" he asked.

I nodded. He closed the book and returned it to the shelf.

"That's our one chance," he said. "If it has been before, it can be done again. We've got to find those stars—whatever they are. And if anyone can help us there, it will be Jameson. I'll see him in the morning."

I agreed, and walked ahead of Holmes from the building, waiting for him on the topmost steps while he bent to lock the outer doors. And suddenly as I stood there, there came suddenly to my ears a sound fraught with horror, a clamor as of a thousands voices in unison, rising abruptly above the noise of traffic on Michigan Avenue and beyond. Holmes swung around.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Those things, you said—went north along the lake shore?"

I nodded, speechless with horror. Holmes took his hand from my arm, pulling himself together.

"That must be from Municipal Pier. We wouldn't hear it otherwise."

Then he shot past me, running toward the car, and I pulled myself from the dark horror enshrouding me, and followed.

The guess had correctly fixed the scene from which the terrifying clamor originated. As the machine drew up in a line of parked cars, I saw police cars not far distant, and farther along, Black Marias.

A loud moaning reached our ears as we came away from the car, and then a sudden, sharp snarling sound. From somewhere, rose a fright-ridden whistling and sucking noise. Someone screamed, and another voice, horribly raucous, laughed hysterically in the night.

Holmes and I ran forward, only to meet an impassable line of policemen! Despite our almost frantic efforts, we got no farther than this line of men, and were forced to return home that night with no more satisfaction than the knowledge that perhaps it had been better for us not to have seen the terrible carnage left by the things from the lake.

The newspapers carried the story the next morning. The horror had begun with an assault upon a pedestrian near the lake shore. It must have occurred almost immediately after the death of the nightwatchman at the Fair Grounds. The papers said that both murders had been committed by the same person or persons, for there were definite tracks between one body and the other—but no paper ventured to guess at what had made the tracks.

Fortunately, the outer pier had been almost deserted because of the cool evening. The pier itself was not yet officially open, yet it had been in use since the first warm March days. There were perhaps fifty people on it.

At about ten o'clock, pedestrians on Michigan Avenue had heard a sudden screaming from the direction of the pier, and the police reached the spot shortly after. The horrible scene upon which they came stopped the whole force for a moment. There were twenty-two newly dead bodies, and the policeman on the pier was one.

But terrible as this scene was, its aftermath was even more awful. It would have been better if all of those on the pier had been killed. But some remaining were strangely mad and bestial. None left on the pier had been granted any longer use of his mind. Intelligence was fled, and in its place had been left only evil, vile bestiality. Men and women, killing each other --- the scene was too awful to describe.

Strangest of all was the manner in which the newspapers received the incident. There were news stories, of course, about the horror. But editorial columns treated the incident more loosely, more facetiously, than any sane editor would write. The police, their inability to give consistent accounts of what they had found, were joked about. The mad gibberings of the unfortunates left alive on the pier, the wild

tales of great hulking things that had come in from the lake, were openly mocked at.

And while the papers featured the tragedy at the pier, all of them were filled with smaller, less detailed notes, showing terribly that the evil reign of horror, fore ordained by the appearance of the creatures from the depths, had begun. All night long, evil had reigned.

The files of newspapers for those terrifying days are open to anyone who wishes to see. Wherever one's eye fell on the day's papers, there were stories of vile and rampant madness. But in the morning, I thought that there was a dead stillness lying over all Chicago, and appalling stillness that was greater than the bustle and noise of commercial activity. Three million people waiting for another night!

Was it the horror of those returned now to their senses, horror following quick upon the realization of evil they had done in the night? Or was it the stillness of crouching evil, waiting for the darkness to cloak its being?

I did not dress for work. That morning I could not have ordered my men about. I was too shaken. But I went down to the Fair Grounds to explain to Tennant the part that I had played in the death of Jackson.

Tennant was not in a good mood. I think it was because he naturally abhorred notoriety, and reporters had been haunting him since dawn. He eyed me glumly as I told him what I knew of the affair. Perhaps I should not have done so, but his incredulity at my story shocked me.

"It's some damned clever trick, that's all," he said. "It's organized crime gone over the edge, the natural result of our tolerating gang rule for so long."

"But, Tennant—" I began, and then broke off.

I could not explain to him. Tennant was a man of hopeless common sense and he would never believe that I had come to accept as fact the legends set down by century-dead scribes.

"The police don't know what to do about it, as usual," he went on. "But I think I do."

I did not guess at his meaning.

"What do you want to do?"

"I'm coming down here tonight," he said, pointing with one extended arm to the spot on the shore where the great, unknown tracks still showed in the moist sand. "I'm coming with about four men and a machine gun. Whatever comes out of that water gets shot down!"

"Look here, Tennant," I cut in, "I don't think you should try any thing unless you're sure—"

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "If you don't want to be on the shore with us, come down and stand up here on the terrace before the Administration Building. You can watch the end of this business, even if you don't want to help!"

I shrugged my shoulders. Knowing Tennant as well as I did, I realized the futility of arguing with him.

"What time?" I asked.

"I'll be here by eight. They came about nine last night."

I hesitated. "I'm going to see Holmes," I said finally. "He's in on this with me, Tennant. If he wants to come over, I'll come, too."

"All right, Sharp. I'll get 'em. Wait and see."

I found Holmes in the museum library. Dr. Jameson was with him. Both of them were searching the old volumes for some clue to the mysteriously potent stars mentioned by Clithanus as the only weapon with which to fight the horror from beneath. I sat down to help them. The anguish of that search was inexpressible—the sudden mad frenzy with which one of us was overcome, thinking he had touched upon the thing for which we sought, the long hours of hopelessness when nothing new came from those pages. But, in the end, our search was utterly futile.

It was five o'clock that afternoon when the last possible source of information had been put back on the shelves. We sat there looking at each other in bitter disappointment. There was nothing we could do without the secret of the stars. The suggestion of world terror soon to follow was horrible.

Tennant came back to my mind suddenly, and I quickly outlined



his plan to Holmes and Jameson. As I had expected, both of them protested angrily.

"We've got to stop him," said Holmes with determination. But almost immediately, despair drooped his shoulders. "But we can't! Despite what has happened, no one would believe us—and we can't try to tell them. That would only hamper us more. As to coming down—no, no, we must not go."

But at eight o'clock that night, Holmes and I stood on the top most step of the Administration Building's terrace, watching the figures down at the shore. The fascination in the promise that we might learn something new of the things from the lake had been too strong for Holmes. We had to come! And so we stood in the dim light and watched the figures silhouetted against the flares Tennant had had put up to light the scene of activity.

For half an hour, we stood there watching the men below us, trying to crush down the forebodings that haunted us. Then suddenly, Holmes clutched my arm. I heard him whispering under his breath, hoarsely, frightened.

"Look! My God, look at them—look down there!"

A horrible fear slowly clamped its hand upon me. A great shadow was rising slowly from the lake. Behind it, another shadow began to grow suddenly out of the lake, farther out, wallowing a little in the water. The first of the creatures gained the shore, splashing about a little.

Then, the first series of shots rang out. The thing did not fall. It paused a moment, its great unshapely bulk limned against the sky, its unnatural leg formations struck deep into the sand. Then came an abrupt sucking noise, as of a great odious beast drawing water through a tube, and abruptly after, a shrill weird whistling from the shadows still rising out of the lake.

The thing on the shore lumbered slowly forward. Another series of shots spoke sharply in the night. Then a pistol report—the thing lumbered closer.

Behind it came others. Now the machine gun was emptying itself

into the shadows, but in a body, with a great sucking and whistling noise, the creatures walked through the steady firing toward the group of men.

Someone screamed suddenly. I felt Holmes' hand clutching my arm so tightly it hurt, but I did not move. One of the men below turned and started to flee. But at that moment, he was overcome by the first shadow, which seemed to collapse suddenly, draping itself over the fleeing man like an abruptly deflated balloon.

There was a sudden death-ridden scream—then another, and another. The shots had stopped.

Below us there was indescribable carnage. Great lumbering floundering shapes on the lake shore where the men had been, suddenly ended screams. The terror-fraught sound of sucking and whistling continued.

Unconscious of what I was doing, I ran forward a few steps, but Holmes dove for my body, quickly drew me back. From down there came the horribly suggestive sound of snapping and breaking—bones! I put up my hands and stopped my ears.

Like a man in a dream, I saw those gigantic shadows draw apart a little, heard the sucking and whistling subside abruptly. The shapes lumbered clumsily but swiftly away along the shore. Somehow, I got to my feet, and followed Holmes toward the still forms that lay on the sand.

There was no sound. Holmes bent briefly over the body of the first man, the one who had first tried to flee from the horror. He turned away, shuddering. We examined those crushed and mangled bodies, and one thought was uppermost in my mind. Where was Tennant?

Suddenly one of the bodies to my right groaned. I dropped quickly and looked at his face. It was Tennant! I felt of him quickly. By some miracle he was alive—apparently he had suffered no bodily injury!

The police had heard the shots, appeared just as we lifted that single living form from the ground and laid it a little apart. Tennant groaned again. Holmes examined the body, quickly, agitated.

"Badly frightened, but not hurt. Strange," he muttered.

I took the revolver which my chief still held tightly in his fist, and

dropped it into my pocket. Holmes was passing his hand rapidly over Tennant's body, to assure himself that Tennant was unhurt.

Abruptly Holmes' expression changed to wonder. His hand stopped at Tennant's coat pocket, fastened around something inside.

Then his hand dived inside Tennant's pocket, and brought out the thing he had felt there. For a moment he held his hand tightly clenched.

"Hope, Sharp!" he whispered.

Then he opened his hand. In his palm lay a piece of stone, not very large, cut in the shape of a five-pointed star!

We followed the ambulance that carried the raving Tennant to the hospital, but they would not admit us to the room in which he was immediately confined. A doctor told us presently that his babbling had lessened, but that his mind still wandered. He would be all right, though, when he recovered from the horrible shock. He had a broken leg, the only serious consequence of his struggle with the thing from the lake. We could wait if he wished, but it might take a long time.

We felt we had to wait. It was too important to learn from Tennant where he had gotten the star-shaped stone.

Holmes drew it from his pocket while we sat outside Tennant's door.

"It is certainly one of the 'blessed stars' mentioned by Clithanus," he said. "It was only because he had that in his pocket that Tennant was spared!"

"But where on earth did Tennant, who knew nothing about the real nature of the things, get this?"

Holmes shrugged. "I can't tell you, but he knows, and he must tell us. Where this one was, there must be others, for so Clithanus intimates."

Once more, he gave his attention to that peculiar stone, cut so exactly into the shape of a five-pointed star. It must have been very old. In color, it was a pale green, but it seemed to have been scraped clean of an outer covering, perhaps by Tennant, for in places there were the distinct marks of a knife blade. We could make out little from the stone itself.

But after several hours of waiting a nurse came from the room with the information that we had better return in the morning. So we went

to my apartment, where we spent the night in ceaseless conjecture. We went over what had happened again and again, touching especially upon the evil effects caused by the appearance of the horror from the depths.

Through some sort of telepathy, these creatures from the lake sent slithering into the minds of men the desires which had led to the awful crimes and orgies of the preceding night—which must be going on this night, too.

When dawn came at last, we bathed and ate before leaving for the hospital. Holmes bought several morning papers at once, merely glanced at the headlines, which justified our belief that further crimes were committed during the night, and then put them aside. He remarked angrily upon the lack of any suggested explanation, and the facetious manner of presenting the crime wave.

When we got to the hospital, we were told that Tennant was conscious and feeling better. He had been awake for some time, had been asking for us. His mind was still somewhat clouded, although he spoke quite clearly.

"Good morning," he said in an exhausted voice. "I'm feeling about as bad as I can remember ever having felt." His assumed smile faded abruptly, and he looked up at us with frightened eyes. "My God, Sharp, what happened? Those fellows who were with me? Where are they? What's become of them? Tell me."

Holmes cut in with a brief account of what had happened the night before, and came quickly to the matter of the stone, which he produced from his pocket.

"Where'd you get that, Tennant?" he asked.

Tennant looked at the stone for a few moments as if not understanding. Then he closed his eyes tightly, forcing his memory back.

"I found that on the lake shore two days ago. The dredge brought up about fifty of them — looked as if they had been laid in a strata or lines along the bottom. At first, I didn't think much about them, but finally I picked one of them up, scraped it, and put it into my pocket. Most of them are still lying near the construction shacks."

Holmes could hardly contain himself. Before Tennant had finished,



Holmes was plucking excitedly at my sleeve. As fast as we could, we left Tennant's room and went at once to the scene of the reclamation, Holmes talking excitedly.

"Do you see it now, Sharp? Those Elder Gods imprisoned the evil ones by the power of the five-pointed stars, their magic held the things at the bottom of the lake until the dredging operations broke the powerful star design on the lake floor. And the fossil we had—that thing summoned the others after the spell was so unwittingly broken."

That was the crux of the mystery. Now it was clear for the first time. And for the first time, I had a feeling of power, for in the stars lay our success, and already this force had been made manifest, for one of them had saved Tennant by its mere presence!

We found the pile of stones at the place Tennant had described. Fortunately it was still intact. We managed without much trouble to find a large crate, into which we dropped the stones. Then, using Holmes' car, we hauled them to the museum laboratory. There we scraped them clean examining each for any sign of inscriptions. But there was none. They were all alike, except that some were larger. The carving was precise, symmetrical. We laid them out on a table.

"It must be at dusk tonight," said Holmes softly, "when there are no workmen or loiterers about. We'll want a barge, and it will have to be placed near the spot from which those first remains were drawn forth. And we'll have to do it alone! We couldn't explain to the police, and in an extremity, we can depend only upon Jameson and Morrison, no one else."

He turned and looked hard at me.

"It's very dangerous, Sharp. I haven't any idea what will happen. We may fail." His eyes were troubled. "Are you ready to do it—knowing what it might mean?"

I nodded. We two alone would fight the evil that had been loosed upon the world.

At dusk, we met on the terrace of the Administration Building. Two hundred feet out on the lake, directly over the spot on which we had been working three days before, a barge was waiting. I had taken

charge in Tennant's absence, and it was an easy matter to order workmen to leave it there, instead of pulling it up to the shore with the others. A rowboat was waiting at the water's edge, and into this we put the crate of stones.

We paused for a moment before we stepped into the boat and looked back at the buildings. No one was in sight. Silently, Holmes stepped into the boat and took a pair of oars. I shoved the boat away from the beach and jumped in.

How could I keep my mind from the horror that I knew lurked beneath the waters? Deep, deep down, there were the things we meant to destroy, things that might so easily destroy us instead. I felt myself gripping hard on the oars to keep from reversing the movement and pulling back toward shore in terror and fright, to flee from that scene and never return. But I kept my mind fixed on the determination that showed in every line of Holmes' bent figure.

In a few moments, the rowboat was scraping at the sides of the barge, and Holmes jumped lightly out and tied it to the heavier craft. Together we lifted out the box with its burden of curious stones and set it on the barge. Then I stepped up.

Feverishly, we went to work, marking out the pattern of a five-pointed star on the barge, a star as great as the surface of the craft would allow. Then we began to place the stones at regular intervals along the chalk lines we had drawn, the five largest stones marking the five points.

It was a mad business, madly done. I was close upon a frenzy when we finished. Now, more than ever, I wished to get into the rowboat and get back to shore.

Together we stepped into the center of that great design, that symbolic thing we had made, outlined by the stars in whose power we had placed our lives. Holmes peered at me.

"Ready?" he asked.

I nodded.

Darkness was falling when Holmes' strong voice rang out over the waters, speaking in Latin in incantation I knew:

"Things walking in the darkness, things not of the earth, things belonging to the damned hosts of evil, get you down into the nameless kingdoms under the seas. Hosts of mad Cthulhu, spawn of unspeakable Hastur, loathsome brood of Yog-Sothoth, get you down into everlasting sleep. Go, in the name of those Elder Gods, the Old Ones, whom once you sought madly to displace. Go now, and the power of the five-pointed star shall forever hold you below the face of the earth in the hidden and lost sea kingdoms of the vast unknown!"

The echoes of the strange and alien words died over the water. Then Holmes began again, more loudly, more clearly. His voice must have gone on, but I was suddenly no longer aware of it. Suddenly there was a great whirling in the air, tremendous whispering sounds not unlike a powerful wind coming at a great distance. And at the same time, the stars on the barge had begun to glow like fire.

What occurred next I don't remember clearly. I remember only that suddenly the entire sky was alight, as if on fire, and then consciousness seemed to be seeping out from me. I struggled to keep my feet, to keep the universe from whirling about the sky. Then blackness fell.

When I opened my eyes again I was still on the barge. Everything was quiet. I crawled over to Holmes, who lay inert near me. Slowly he opened his eyes as I shook him. Then he got up, looking eagerly about him.

The stars were gone—all of them. There was only the barren surface. We leaned far over the side of the barge and peered at the slime around it—a horrible green slime, from which arose a putrid odor of long-dead things. Silently, Holmes led the way across the barge to the rowboat, and we started back to the city.

Holmes told me later what had happened after I passed out that night—told me why the things had been destroyed utterly, annihilated, rather than buried again. And this explained at the same time the weird stories of the columns of fire seen over the lake, stories that the papers reported the morning after our adventure.

Suddenly, as he chanted the secret words aloud, Holmes heard a

great wind come from the north, and in its wake he saw gigantic pillars of fire writhing and flaming in the night, and from these pillars had come stabbing, blinding rays of annihilation and death!

What they were, Holmes would not reveal. But in the delirium before his death, he mumbled the secret and I heard it in awe. From the frozen and impenetrable fastnesses in the far and unexplored northlands and from beyond, from the far reaches of the sky, had come a greater power even than our stones to help us in our battle with the evil spawn that lay in the lake. It had come to help annihilate an age-old enemy that once before had fought against it. It was the Elder Gods, sweeping down with the wind from the north, avenging mankind, destroying forever the brood of Cthulhu, the horror from the depths!



## *The Occupant of the Crypt*

About twenty minutes after Eric Somerset alighted from the London Midnight Express at Blackpool, he began to curse the station-agent in no very genteel fashion. Fortunately, that individual was nowhere in sight, neither was a shelter from the rain and fog. It was hardly reasonable to expect the station agent's presence at one o'clock in the morning, even if he must have known of Somerset's arrival because of sending him the telegram that lay, wet and crumbled in Somerset's hand. The thought of it brought Somerset to reading it again:

COME AT ONCE BLACKPOOL BRING WILL STOP  
MEET YOU ONE OCLOCK

Lonsdale

Remembering that Lord Lonsdale was the firm's best client sobered him. He took off his pince-nez and wiped them. For the first time he was aware of the noise of a horn above the din of the rain on the station's tin roof. At the same moment he spied the car's dimmed headlights and heard a girl's voice calling,

"Is that Mr. Somerset? Come this way, please."

He lost no time, snatching up his brief case and running with all his might toward the car, his glasses swinging wildly around him.

The car's rooflight was on. With her left arm braced against the glass, Amber Joyce bent away from the upholstered seat, leaning forward enough to catch a good glimpse of Somerset.

Miss Joyce's eyes twinkled. "Slam the door. Beastly weather, isn't it?"

A moment later the machine pulled away from the curb, spattering the back with heavy mud. Miss Joyce turned to the solicitor

Somerset cleared his throat and asked, "What's happened?"

Amber Joyce sank back nervously. Her voice, coming at last, sounded vague and frightened. "Uncle Arthur's disappeared."

"That scapegrace! That ought to relieve Lonsdale, if anything."

Miss Joyce shrugged. "The circumstances of his disappearance were very strange. Uncle Arthur had come up to see Uncle Hilary; they were on pretty good terms that night. I went to bed early, but I couldn't sleep. At about two o'clock I heard a scream, followed by a thudding crash. I got up and went down into the library, where I had left the men. Uncle Hilary was there, sound asleep. Uncle Arthur was gone, but he'd left his stick behind.

"I shook Uncle Hilary until he woke. He looked at me in a dazed way and said, 'I thought you'd gone to bed, Amber.' I said I had, but something had brought me down again. Then he turned to face the chair that Uncle Arthur had been using, and began to say something; half-way through the sentence he stopped and said, 'Has Arthur gone, then?' He looked sort of frightened. 'When did he go?' he asked. 'Was I sleeping?' I said that it was two o'clock. Then suddenly he turned to the stand next his chair, took up his wine glass, and muttered something. I heard it. He said, 'Drugged my wine, did he?' Then he packed me off to bed again.

"Next morning he seemed troubled. At about ten o'clock he tried to telephone Arthur; he hadn't come in. The housekeeper said Uncle Arthur hadn't come back. That was three days ago, and there's been no word from Uncle Arthur since."

"There's no evidence that Arthur left the house that night?" asked Somerset.

"None. Uncle Hilary's been very uneasy. Yesterday he sent for Uncle Napier—Father Napier, you know, his older brother."

Somerset frowned. "If he sends for Napier, your Uncle Hilary fears something serious has happened to Arthur. Has he dropped any suspicion in your hearing?"

Amber Joyce nodded. "Yesterday I overheard Uncle Hilary talking to Father Napier." For a moment she was silent. "Mr. Somerset, did you know there's a weird sort of superstition in our family?"

"I wasn't aware of it."

"Uncle Hilary's grandfather—my great grandfather, that is, built that house up there on the site of an ancient monastery or abbey, I don't know which. Anyway, it wasn't until after Henry VIII's time that genuine priests—priests of God, I mean—ever got into that building. Before that, some devilish cult thrived there." Miss Joyce paused. "I sound like a cheap novel, don't I?" She coughed a little. "But there's something in it, just the same. Uncle Hilary has some old books about the place, and in several there's mention of some ghastly thing, it says, *thing*, and the inference is pretty clear that it was a living thing, a sort of entity, which was found there by the priests."

"Nothing definite—but it appears that the building was torn down, and the land taken over by the government, and held until great-grandfather bought it. He left something to pique the curiosity of those who came after him. Far below the house as it now stands there's a very old crypt; great-grandfather in his written instructions to his children hints that this crypt existed long before the old Lonsdale line came into being, that's pretty old, you know. The crypt is sealed, though accessible from the library of the house, and also from a drawing-room on the second floor. The family superstition concerns this crypt; it's never to be opened, the oldest member of each generation in the direct line was to be informed of its existence, no one else. But since Uncle Napier entered the priesthood, the title and estates fell to Uncle Hilary."

"Somehow the story of the crypt got to Uncle Arthur, and he got it into his head that there was treasure down there. What Uncle Hilary has begun to suspect is that Uncle Arthur drugged him; so he could go down and look into the crypt for himself."

"A reasonable suspicion, in view of his brother's more or less incontinent life."

"You restrain yourself with *incontinent*, Mr. Somerset." Amber Joyce laughed. "It's still difficult for Uncle Hilary to see how Uncle Arthur could have got down there, because both openings to the crypt are panel arrangements, cleverly hidden, and the passage through the wall is narrow and pretty secret."

"A determined man will do anything."

The car jolted to a stop. In a moment the door swung open. The chauffeur, holding an opened umbrella, guided first Amber Joyce and then Somerset onto the wide verandah. They stood there, smiling at each other in the warm glow from the half-open door.

Somerset found himself within a half-hour in dressing gown and slippers, a welcome change from his wet clothes. He met Amber Joyce on the way to the library; she was standing in a niche, waiting for him. She wore a dress of some dark stuff, blending with the darkness of the corridor. A shaft of light struck her only at the throat, where she had bound a brilliant green scarf.

"Uncle Hilary's gone to the crypt," she said as Somerset came up to her.

Father Napier, a tall thin man, closely resembling Lord Lonsdale, stood meditatively alone as the solicitor entered the library with Amber Joyce. He turned toward Somerset.

"I understand his lordship has gone down into the forbidden crypt," said the solicitor, after greetings had been exchanged.

Father Napier nodded. "Amber told you, then?"

"How long has he been gone?" asked Somerset.

"About ten minutes—he went down after you came."

"One would think," fumed Somerset, "considering what time it is, that he might hurry."

"I think he's coming now," said Amber Joyce suddenly.

In the abrupt silence that fell, footsteps could be heard. They seemed to be coming upward from far below the house, yet close to the library, along the wall.

"The panel is just over there," said Father Napier. He indicated a section of bookshelves toward which Somerset turned an expectant eye.

Then Amber Joyce said something, and the noise of the ascending footsteps was lost. When she had finished, the sound had stopped.

"Odd," murmured Father Napier. "He must have gone on to the second floor."

"But he wouldn't do that," said Amber Joyce.

Father Napier coughed. "I think we'd better go look for him," he



said quietly. He turned slightly toward the silent figure of the butler standing impassive in the shadows. "Frobisher, you stay here with Miss Joyce. Mr Somerset and I will go down into the crypt."

The priest went to the wall and touched a spring which Somerset could not see. A panel swung back, disclosing a narrow passage beyond.

"We'll have to go single file," said Father Napier.

"You lead," said Somerset.

The two of them stepped into the wall, walked a short distance along the passage, and came to a flight of stone steps, curving slightly below the foundations of the house. They went down. Presently the stairs began to broaden a little, and they came to a flat space. The ceiling was so low that they had to crouch and crawl along. There followed another short flight of stairs, and then suddenly the flashlight fell upon a half-open stone door, opening into a terrifying darkness. It was the crypt, and there was no light, as there should have been.

"Hilary," called Father Napier suddenly.

There was no answer. Father Napier pushed on cautiously, leaning against the door to move it back a little more. The light struck a large stone coffin, from which the lid had been pushed to one side. Curiously, Father Napier and Somerset stepped closer.

"There's a Latin inscription here," said Somerset.

Father Napier turned his flash on the inscription. "Will you read it; I can't."

Somerset bent laboriously to the task.

*"CVIVS. PASSVS. HIC. INSTAT.  
CVIVS. MANVS. DESCENDIT.  
HOC. SEPVLCRVM. VT. TANGAT.  
EI. CERTE. MORIENDVM. EST."*

"Roughly," translated the priest:

*"Whose step halts here  
Whose hand descends  
To touch this bier  
That man shall die."*

He coughed. "Not very comforting."

But Somerset was no longer listening. The flash had wavered a little, and a shaft of light had been thrown to a far corner of the crypt; Somerset, following that shaft of light with his eyes, saw suddenly a man's shoe, and above it a human leg.

In as steady a voice as he could command, he said, "Please flash that light into that corner. I think there's someone there."

Father Napier came around the empty coffin and sent the light into the corner. In the yellow glow lay the crumpled body of a man, his clothes horribly torn, his upturned face ghastly.

The light began to tremble in Father Napier's hand. "Arthur!" he exclaimed. He made no move to approach the body, though Somerset went forward immediately.

Somerset said, "He's been dead for at least three days." He came away from the body. "Let's get out of this place, I'm afraid something's happened to his lordship."

Father Napier said nothing; apparently deep in thought, he went out of the crypt, Somerset following. Then, abruptly, came a sound which held them both on the threshold of the crypt. It was a low moan—an unmistakably human sound!

The light swung around, halting abruptly at a niche in the stone passage. A shuddering hand lay palm upward in the passage, and beyond it, bent together in the niche, was Lord Lonsdale. Somerset ran forward, pulling at his lordship.

"He's living," he said shortly. "We must get him upstairs. He must have had a terrible struggle with something. Lend me a hand, will you?"

Father Napier came forward, more steady now. "Something horrible has happened," he said quietly. "Do you remember hearing something go upstairs?"

Mr. Somerset nodded, suddenly remembering. "What was it?" he asked. "Something . . . from down there?"

"The crypt should never have been opened. I don't think you and I can cope with this thing—if only it's no longer in the house. I'm going to call someone who can."

Professor Charles Lambert groaned a little in his sleep; then he turned over and awoke. The telephone bell was skirling shrilly. He shook himself a little and picked up the instrument.

"Hullo?"

"Lambert? 'This is Napier."

"You woke me!"

Napier went on, apparently not heeding him. "You remember that conversation we had about ancient cults and mysteries last weekend? I know you do. Listen, can you get a short leave? Something's come up out here at Hilary's place, something I think you would like to be in on, something I want you in on. My brother Arthur's been killed, and Hilary's been attacked. Something from below—yes, from the old crypt I mentioned to you last weekend. It was opened, and something came up out of there. We were in the library. Heard someone walking. Thought at first it must be Hilary. It wasn't. We've found Hilary, badly bruised down near the crypt. Whatever came up has escaped—it's out of the house. We've got to get the thing before it can do any more harm. Can you come down at once?"

Lambert was wide awake. The tense, excited tones of his ordinarily gentle clerical friend, and the almost incoherent story he was jerkily telling him over the wire had drawn him quickly from the semi-conscious state in which he had first taken up the telephone. "Yes," he said. "I can get down by noon today."

Professor Lambert pulled on his dressing-gown and went into his library, where he lost himself in the yellowed pages of an ancient volume to which he had gone unerringly. The faded handwriting in the book was difficult to follow, but he persevered, turning page after page in the glow of a reading lamp, until presently he found what he sought—a short paragraph deep in the heart of the volume . . .

"These eldritch beings, sprung from the source of all evil, know but one fear. Arms and steel are of no avail against them, even though they are of form, of a certain flesh and blood—blood being their power and their life, because of which in their freedom they seek it endlessly, and woe betide the unfortunate in their path. Evil these things are and will always be, and they fear only their one great and

true enemy, which is good, and the source of all good, which is God. And the more steeped in goodness, the stronger shall the charm be . . .”

He closed the book and, going over to a collection of old silver carefully boxed into the wall, he chose a crucifix and an ancient medallion. Now, but for dressing, he was ready.

Lambert found Frobisher awaiting him on the verandah, and followed him up the stairs to Lonsdale's room. There, on the great oaken bed, he saw Lord Lonsdale himself, heavily swathed in bandages. Around him stood Father Napier, Amber Joyce, and Somerset, all of whom Lambert knew well. Father Napier hurried to greet him, his hand outstretched.

“Good of you to come, Lambert. Hilary's just come to. Doctor says he'll be all right. We're waiting for him to talk—though he's had a devilish shock.”

“Attacked . . . by . . .?”

Father Napier nodded hastily. “Severely. Seems to have lost a good deal of blood, besides suffering from a great many deep scratches. Wrist broken, too. We've called an ambulance to take him to a hospital. It would be better for him there.”

“Quite right,” murmured Lambert, approaching the bed. He exchanged hushed greetings with the others in the room, then looked at the face of Lord Lonsdale, wan and pale on the pillow. His eyes were moving back and forth, taking in the people who watched him so closely.

Suddenly his lordship spoke. “What happened to Arthur? I saw him there—in the crypt.”

“Dead,” said Napier quietly.

Hilary groaned slightly. “Drugged me, you know,” he said. The group about the bed waited in silence. Then, without introduction, Lord Lonsdale spoke, his eyes fastened on the ceiling. “It came out of the crypt—as the paper said, Napier. I came down, looking for Arthur . . . the door of the crypt was unsealed, but it had closed somehow from the inside. Probably closed before Arthur got the coffin open. I opened it, just a little. It was waiting. It was on me, clutching, crushing . . . had me on the floor, dragging me along . . . I don't remember



what happened. . . . Isn't out, is it?" He raised himself a little, weakly. There was no answer, and at once he guessed. "God help us!" he murmured, falling back and closing his eyes.

Napier bent over him. "Listen, Hilary, we're sending you into the city—to a hospital. You'll be better there."

Lord Lonsdale made no response. His breathing went on, deep and fast.

Shortly after mid afternoon, the three men and Amber Joyce gathered in the library. Somerset produced his portfolio, looking at Father Napier. "I daresay, in the circumstances, it's best that the whole group know about your late father's letter, despite his explicit wishes?"

Napier nodded.

Somerset opened his case and withdrew a single paper, which he began at once to read.

"My dear Son: As the future Lord Lonsdale, it is essential that you have certain information concerning Lonsdale House, information which has been handed down from generation to generation, ever since this house was built. Lonsdale House is built on the foundations of an old abbey, dating back to perhaps 1400, an abbey not occupied by monks until near 1550.

"What hellish people first occupied this site is not known. One hundred and fifty years remain unaccounted for in its history. Yet there are certain legends, vague rumours and tales, which in their own way characterize the first inhabitants. Certainly they were not monks. There are stories of ancient cults of evil, not unlike the Druids. I have heard that a cult established itself in a building on Blackpool Heath. There are weird tales of strange uncanny creatures loping over the countryside, killing and destroying, leaving their victims crushed and bloodless.

"There is historical evidence of something existing here, and there is added record of strange crimes and disappearances as late as 1545. Yes, and even after the monks came in 1550, some of them disappeared. The abbey was at this time much closer to the sea and it was thought for a time that the monks had been taken by some strange sea creature

There is a half-formed belief that whatever was worshipped originally here was bound in some way to the sea, perhaps first came from the sea. None can say anything definite about the site of Lonsdale House.

'Yet something remains. The first inhabitants of this site left something, and this the monks later discovered, and by their own power locked this thing in a crypt far below the abbey. And when Lonsdale House rose on the site of the abbey, the crypt was still sealed. The first Lord Lonsdale built the secret stair that leads to it from the panel in the library, and from the panel in the wall of the second-floor drawing room.

"The thing is in a stone coffin, likewise sealed, within the sealed crypt. I tell you these things for your own good, and to warn you. We do not know what thing is down there, but it is a thing of evil, and it is better that we do not know. Therefore, the crypt must never be opened.

"Keep this that I have revealed to you a secret, for it is better that only one in each generation should know. Further knowledge makes for curiosity, and curiosity makes here for peril and utmost horror. Therefore, *do not seek out the occupant of the crypt below!*"

There was a long moment of silence. Then Amber coughed and said, "Wasn't Uncle Arthur found crushed and bloodless?"

Napier looked uncomfortable. Then he said, "Yes, he was found that way. Arthur didn't know what to expect in the crypt; he knew less than we, by far. He knew only that the crypt was down there, that there was something mysterious about it, and naturally, his mind went to hidden treasure. He went down, and had very likely been imbibing freely. He broke the seals on the crypt, and pried open the coffin. The thing in the coffin attacked and killed him. The door, I think, swung shut behind him, and the thing could not get it open. Then Hilary came down, and he in turn was attacked and left half dead on the floor."

Lambert cut in. "The thing obviously has intelligence, for it found its way out of the house, though its leaving the passage on the second floor instead of in the library seems only a fortunate chance."

Napier nodded. "And the window was open and the room empty."

He paused significantly. Amber drew her arm tightly through his. He looked down at her. "Nothing to fear, my child," he said. "The thing was glad enough apparently to get out of here. I don't think it will come back."

"Yet," said Amber suddenly, "this is the only home it had for years. Perhaps . . ."

Frobisher entered noiselessly; he was perturbed, and at once Amber Joyce came to her feet. "Anything wrong, Frobisher?" she asked.

"The paper, Miss Joyce," he said. He held out a newspaper, folded upon a lead. Amber Joyce had only time to see the headline, "OUTRAGE NEAR BLACKPOOL" when Father Napier snatched the paper from Frobisher.

He glanced hurriedly over the account, his face paling. Then he looked up. "Listen to this!" he said sharply, and read: "Early this morning two laborers on their way to work were assaulted on the high-road between Blackpool and Liddleton. The bodies of the two men, John Thornton and Frank Doyle, were discovered later this morning near the road about three miles from the Lonsdale estate. Apparently the men made a powerful struggle, for they were both almost crushed and horribly mangled. First examination of the bodies seemed to indicate that much blood had been lost, though there is no evidence of this on the ground near the bodies."

"There is no clue to the identity of the killer, but Blackpool officials are searching the surrounding country. A peculiarity of the search has been the discovery of depressions in the earth as if someone had dragged or pushed along some large shapeless object."

To each of them there had come the same horrible dread, the same sudden fear of the unknown death so near to them, four times attempted, three times completed.

It was Lambert's cool voice that broke the silence. "We've got to hunt that thing out at once, and hope that we may not come too late."

Father Napier was on his feet on the instant, he moved to a shelf of books, from which he took down an atlas. He went toward Lambert, holding the atlas open at a detail map of Lancastershire.

'Here we are,' he said. 'Blackpool and its environs. Here's Liddleton.' His index finger drew a straight line from a square marked 'Lonsdale Estate' to the hamlet called Liddleton. Then it went back and stopped on a square midway between the two. 'The ruins of Pemberton Lodge,' he murmured. 'It must have been heading there. Almost an acre of tumbled-down stone buildings in which to hide until night. Then, abroad again. Tonight, more attacks. We must go for that thing now, before sundown.'

Somerset motioned to the butler. 'Frobisher, bring down Lord Lonsdale's pistols.'

Lambert stopped him, smiling. 'They won't do us any good, Somerset. You can't fight an unholy thing like this with man-made weapons. There's only one force stronger than the evil one represented in the thing we're pursuing. That's the holy power of good against which this thing stands opposed.'

Napier and Somerset nodded quickly, understanding. Lambert went on. 'I've got an ancient crucifix, and an equally old medallion. Both were blessed by St. Augustine. I think they'll protect us.'

Somerset said, 'Well, are we ready?'

Outside, they stepped into the waiting car and started toward Liddleton. It was already almost half past four, and the dimness of autumn dusk was mingling with the heavy fog that came in from the sea. Driving along the road, they could see only the faintest outline of trees on either side. In the distance they could hear the roll of the ocean, coming from beyond Lonsdale House. But the chauffeur, at the urgent order of Father Napier, did not lessen his customary speed because of the fog. He knew the road over the moors to the neighboring Liddleton, and he knew the ruins of Pemberton Lodge, where he had often driven Miss Joyce and parties of picnickers. The car swung suddenly off the main road and came to a stop.

The three men stepped from the car and stood there for a moment, looking about them in the fog-ridden dusk. The motor roared as the driver turned the car about, then subsided suddenly. In the silence, the booming of the sea from behind was the first sound that reached them. Before them, slowly emerging from the heavy atmosphere, was



the gray silhouette of the main ruin of what had once been Pemberton Lodge. The three men walked slowly closer. Father Napier flashed ahead the light he was carrying, but its ray did little to pierce the fog. They stopped at the fallen arch of the main door. Father Napier moved the light about in the shadowy pit that confronted them, and then, holding aloft the crucifix he carried, stepped under the arch.

There came suddenly a low rumbling from the fog beyond, a sound as of some heavy thing lumbering over broken stones. Then there was a snarl of fury and fear. Directly upon the sound a great shadowy figure appeared ahead of them, emerging from the arch of of a long broken window, lumbering from this gap. The three men wheeled about.

"There!" shouted Father Napier.

But already the thing was moving awkwardly away from them, its great head bobbing, its cumbrous arms swinging; already it was loping away over the moor, lost in the fog before they could think of moving after it.

They ran back to the car and clambered in. Father Napier shouted, "Up the Blackpool road!"

The motor roared once more in the deepening dusk, and sped away up the highway. Abruptly, the chauffeur pulled on the brakes, and the motor ground to a halt.

"What's wrong?" demanded Napier.

"Someone trying to cross the road, sir. Just missed him, I think."

Father Napier leaned forward, piercing the fog illuminated by the brilliant headlights, and saw, in that moment, the thing disappearing in the trees near the highway. It had crossed the road almost immediately ahead of them. He jumped out and ran to the side of the highway, stopping under the row of trees that marked it off from the heath. There he saw it disappearing once more, moving clumsily yet swiftly over the heath. And then he saw, directly in its path, the lights of Lonsdale House.

He came running back to the car, shouting, "Quickly, to the house!" Somerset and Lambert, equally excited, leaned forward anxiously. Father Napier sank back in his seat. Then as the car plunged ahead into the

night, he exclaimed breathlessly, "It's cutting back to the house, and Amber's there alone with Frobisher."

Amber Joyce, left alone in the library, had paced back and forth across the room for some time in great excitement. She stood out on the terrace extending over the top of the cliff; she was restless still, and disturbed. Though she returned at last to the library, and opened a book, she could not read.

In the distance she heard a motor roaring, and wondered whether the three men were already coming back. Then she sat up suddenly, an abrupt scream tearing into her consciousness.

She heard vague, terrifying sounds, coming from the front of the house—a sound as of a door crashing inward somewhere, a man's voice moaning, lumbering thuds in the corridor beyond the library. Then abruptly the library door caved inward, and before her in the dim half-light stood the thing she knew instinctively to have come from the crypt. She had only a glimpse of its black, horny body, its red little eyes, its long swinging ape-like arms before it sprang toward her. She remembered suddenly the conversation of a few hours before—something about holy things, and at the same instant she leaped back against the wall and wrenched down the old abbey crucifix which had been kept in the library.

Then she braced herself against the wall, holding the crucifix out before her, and stared at the thing, halted now. There came from it now a sound not unlike a whimper, and it struck Amber Joyce abruptly that the thing was frightened. It, too, pressed itself against the wall, moving slowly away from her along the shelves of books.

The sound of a car screeching to a stop outside came to Amber Joyce's ears. The thing also heard, paused a moment, then moved awkwardly back toward the broken library door. It was too late—already running footsteps could be heard coming down the corridor. Father Napier appeared suddenly, holding before him a crucifix, and the thing gave way before him. Amber Joyce slid silently to the floor; she had fainted.

Somerset and Professor Lambert ran into the room, each of them guarded, and the thing sprang, striking the shelved wall with a tre-

mendous impact, crashing it at the panel, and went lumbering out of sight, down the stairs. Father Napier ran quickly to Amber Joyce. Lambert and Somerset stood listening to the retreating thuds—sounds moving heavily down, down, down . . . until they were lost in the depths of the crypt.

Lambert spoke quietly, urgently "The thing's vampiric, Napier. And we can get it with a stake, preferably an iron one. If we settle this thing now, there'll be an end to it—otherwise, there's no telling what might happen."

Father Napier nodded. "Yes. I know just the thing we want. A large staple in the wall—it's loose—down near the crypt." He looked at Somerset, and added, "Somerset, stay here with Amber. Call the chauffeur if you need someone. Lambert and I will go down."

Somerset nodded, and bent to take up the slight form of Amber Joyce. The two men approached the broken wall carefully, then stepped beyond it into the passage, out of sight. Somerset, chafing Miss Joyce's hands, heard the sound of their descending footsteps, the sound of boots striking stones, hearing the two men make a cautious but certain descent. He heard suddenly a muffled sound of stone rubbing stone. Then, silence. He stood there a moment, perplexed, then lowered Amber Joyce gently to the couch before him.

The chauffeur appeared suddenly in the doorway, and Somerset was glad to see him. "Are there any salts about?" he asked. "Miss Joyce has fainted."

"I'll get some, sir." The chauffeur retreated.

Somerset sat on the edge of the couch, listening. Echoes of some indistinguishable sounds came up from the crypt—a low, mumbling sound, as of some chanting, or incantation. Then there was a sudden, horrible wail that crept upward from below, a wail so ghastly, so terrible, that Somerset shuddered, and the chauffeur who had not gone far, came running back into the room, trembling and white.

Father Napier and Lambert came from the aperture in the wall just as Amber Joyce came to. "Dust in an old coffin," said Napier. "Nothing more. . ." He put the crucifix on the table, and his hand shook in the lamplight.

## *The House in the Magnolias*

If you had seen the magnolias, you would understand without further explanation from me why I went back to the house. My friends in New Orleans realized that it was just such a place as an artist like myself would light upon for his subject. Their objections to my going there were not based on notions that the house and its surroundings were not fit subjects for really excellent landscape paintings. No, they agreed with me there. Where they disagreed. . . . But I had better fill in the background for you before I get too far ahead in my story.

I had been in New Orleans a month, and still had found no subject in that old city that really satisfied me. But, motoring one day out into the country with Sherman Jordan, a young poet with whom I was living during my stay in the city, we found ourselves about four miles out of New Orleans, driving along a little-used road over which the willows leaned low. The road broadened unexpectedly, and the willows gave way to a row of sycamores, and then, in the evening dusk, I saw the house in the magnolias for the first time.

It was not far from the road, and yet not too close. A great veranda with tall pillars stretched its length in front. The house itself was of white wood, built in the typical rambling Southern plantation style. Vines covered great portions of its sides, and the whole building was literally buried in magnolias—magnolias such as I have never seen before, in every shade and hue. They were fully opened, and even from the road I could see the heavy waxen artificiality of those nearest.



"There's my picture!" I exclaimed eagerly "Stop the car, old man."

But Sherman Jordan showed no inclination to stop. He glanced quickly at his watch and said by way of explanation: "It's almost six, we've got to get back for our dinner engagement." He drove on without a second glance at the house.

I was disappointed. "It would have taken only a minute," I reproached him.

I must have looked glum, for just as we were driving into New Orleans, he turned and said: "I'm sorry, I didn't think it was so important." I felt suddenly, inexplicably, that he was not sorry, that he had gone past the house deliberately.

I said: "Oh, it doesn't make any difference. I can come out tomorrow."

He was silent for a moment. Then he said: "Do you really think it would be such a good picture?"

"I do," I said, and at the same instant I thought that he didn't want me to paint that house. "Will you drive me out tomorrow morning?" I added.

"I can't," he said shortly. "I've promised Stan Leslie I'd go boating with him. But you can have the car, if you really insist on painting that house."

I said nothing.

As we left the car he turned and said almost sharply: "Still, I think you might find better subjects if you tried."

A cutting reply about my wasted month in New Orleans was on the tip of my tongue, but I held it back. I could not understand my friend's utter lack of enthusiasm. I could not check it up to an inartistic eye, for I knew Sherman Jordan could be depended on for good taste. As I went upstairs to dress, there remained in my mind the picture of that lovely old house, surrounded by rich magnolias, marked off by the swaying sycamore trees.

My eagerness had not abated when I stepped from Jordan's car next morning, opened the gate, and went up the path under the sycamores to the house in the magnolias. As I mounted the steps, walked across the veranda, and lifted the knocker on the closed door, I thought

of painting a close-up of magnolias. I was turning this idea over in my mind when the door opened suddenly, noiselessly. And old woman stood there, apparently a Negress, dressed plainly in starched white. Her face held me. It was peculiarly ashy—really gray—unhealthy. I thought: 'The woman is ill.' Her eyes stared at me; they were like deep black pools, bottomless, inscrutable, and yet at the same time oddly dull. I felt momentarily uncomfortable.

"Is the master in?" I asked.

The woman did not answer, though she continued to stare at me. For a moment I thought that perhaps she was deaf. I spoke loudly, and very distinctly, repeating 'Is your master in?' May I see your master?"

A faint shadow fell across the floor of the hall behind the servant, and in an instant, a second woman appeared. "What is it?" she asked sharply, in a deep, velvety voice. The woman was so astonishingly attractive that for a moment I could not speak for admiration. She was almost as tall as I was, and very shapely. Her hair was black and drawn back loosely from her face. Her complexion was swarthy, almost olive, with a high color in cheeks and lips. In her ears were golden rings. Her eyes, which were black, shone from dark surrounding shadows. She wore a purple dress that fell almost to the floor. Her face as she looked at me was imperious, behind her dark eyes were smoldering fires.

She waved the servant aside and turned to me, repeating her question: "What is it, please?"

With my eyes on her face, I said: "I am John Stuard. I paint. Yesterday, driving past your place here, I was so attracted by the house that I felt I must come and ask your permission to use it as a subject for a landscape."

"Will you come in?" she asked, less sharply.

She stepped to one side. I muttered my thanks and went past her into the hall. Behind me I could feel the woman's alert eyes boring into me. I turned, and she gestured for me to precede her into the drawing room leading off the hall. I went ahead. In the drawing room we sat down.

'You are from New Orleans?' she asked. She leaned a little forward, her somber eyes taking in my face. She was sitting in shadow, and I directly in the light from the half opened window.

'No,' I replied. 'I live in Chicago. I am only visiting in New Orleans.' She looked at me at moment before replying. 'Perhaps it can be arranged for you to paint the house. It will not take long? How many days, please?'

'A week, perhaps ten days. It is quite difficult.'

She appeared suddenly annoyed. She was just about to say something when some distant sound caught her ear, and she jerked her head up, looking intently into a corner of the ceiling, as if listening. I heard nothing. Presently she turned again. 'I thought it might be for only a day or two,' she said, biting her lower lip.

I began to explain when I heard the old servant shuffle toward the door that led out to the veranda. The woman before me looked up quickly. Then she called out in a low persuasive voice: 'Go back to the kitchen, Matilda.'

Looking through the open drawing room doors, I saw the servant stop in her tracks, turn automatically, and shuffle past the door down the hall, walking listlessly, stiffly.

'Is the woman ill?' I asked solicitously.

'*Non, non,*' she said quickly. Then she said abruptly: 'You do not know my name; I am Rosamunda Marsina.'

Belatedly, I said: 'I am glad to know you. You live here alone?'

There was a pause before she answered me. 'The servant,' she said, smiling lightly. She looked a little troubled. I felt that I should not have asked.

To cover my embarrassment, I said: 'You have a nice plantation.'

She shook her head quickly. 'It is not mine. It belongs to Miss Abby, my Aunt Abby. She is a Haitian.'

'Oh, I see,' I said, smiling; 'She lives in Haiti?'

'No, she does not live in Haiti. She did live there. She came from there some years ago.'

I nodded, but I did not quite understand. Looking about me, I could see that everything was scrupulously clean and well taken care

of, and this was certainly a large house for a single servant to keep so well. I had seen from a glance at Miss Marsina's hands that she had no share in the labors of the household.

Miss Marsina bent forward again. "Tell me, say, I give you permission to paint the house—you would stay in the city?"

My eyes dropped confusedly before hers, and at her question my face fell, for my disappointment was evident to her. I had hoped she would ask me to live in the house for the time that I painted it. Once more I started an explanation to Rosamunda Marsina, suggesting that I might find some place in the neighborhood where I could get a room for the time, but throughout my explanation, I openly, shamelessly hinted at an invitation from her to stay here.

My speech seemed to have its effect. "Perhaps I could give you a room for that time," she said reluctantly.

I accepted her invitation at once. She fidgeted a little nervously, and asked: "When do you wish to begin painting?"

"I should like to start sketching tomorrow. The painting I shall have to do mostly late in the afternoon. I want to get the half-light in which I first saw the house—"

She interrupted me abruptly. "There will be some conditions to staying here—a request I must make of you, perhaps two." I nodded. "I am not a very sociable creature," she went on. "I do not like many people about. I must ask you not to bring any friends out with you, even for short visits. And I would rather, too, that you didn't mention your work out here unless necessary—it might reach the ears of Aunt Abby; perhaps she would not like it."

I saw nothing strange in her request, nothing strange in this mysteriously beautiful woman. "I shouldn't think of bringing anyone, Miss Marsina," I said. "I feel I am presuming as it is."

She stopped me with a quick, abrupt "*Non*," and a slightly upraised hand. Then she smiled. "I shall expect you tomorrow then."

Both of us got up and walked to the door. I said, "Good-by," almost automatically. Then I started walking down the path, away from the house, feeling Rosamunda Marsina's eyes on me. Suddenly I heard running footsteps, light footsteps, and turned to meet Miss Marsina.



"One thing more, Mr. Stuard," she said hurriedly, talking in a low voice as if afraid of being overheard. "Tomorrow—is it necessary for you to bring your car? Cars disturb me." She looked pathetically at me.

"I shall not bring the car," I said.

She nodded, quickly, shortly, and ran back into the house without pausing. Looking back from the road, I saw her standing at the open window of the drawing room, watching me.

I found Rosamunda Marsina waiting for me next morning. She seemed a little agitated; I wondered whether anything had gone wrong.

"Shall I bring in the equipment and my easel?" I asked.

'Matilda can bring it to your room,' she said "Come with me. I am going to put you on the ground floor."

She turned and led the way into the house and down the hall. Opening a door not far beyond the drawing room she stretched out her arm and indicated the charming old chamber which I was to occupy, a room with great heavy mahogany bureau and four-poster, with a desk, and windows opening directly on the garden at the side of the house.

"It's lovely," I murmured.

She looked at me with her dark eyes, not as sharp today as they had been the day before. They were limpid and soft, tender, I thought. Then abruptly I caught a flash of something I was not meant to see; it was present only for a moment, and her eyes veiled it again—unmistakable fear!

She could not have known that I had seen, for she said "You must not venture off the grounds, and not behind the house. And you will not go to any of the other floors?"

I said; "No, certainly not."

Matilda shuffled into the room, and without a word or a glance at us, put the equipment down near the bed. She departed with the same dragging footsteps.

"A curious woman," I said.

Rosamunda Marsina laughed a little uncertainly "Yes; she is very old. She came here with my aunt."

"Oh," I said. "Your aunt is *here*, then?"

She looked at me, shot a quick startled glance at me. "Didn't I tell you?" she asked. "I thought I told you yesterday—yes, she is here. That is why I have made so many requests of you; it is because I don't want her to know you are here." Her voice betrayed her agitation, though her face remained immobile.

"She can hardly help seeing me some time, I'm afraid."

"*Non, non*—not if you do as I say." Once again fear crept into her eyes. She spoke quickly in a low voice. "She is a near-invalid. She has a club foot, and never leaves the back rooms of the second floor because it is so difficult for her to move." Rosamunda Marsina's hand was trembling. I took it in my own.

"If she would object to my being here, perhaps I had better go to one of your neighbors," I volunteered.

She closed her eyes for a moment, then flashed them open and looked at me calmly, saying impetuously: "I want you to stay. My aunt must not matter—even though she does. You must stay now; I want you to stay. She is not really my aunt, I don't think. She brought me from Haiti when I was just a little girl. I cannot remember anything. She is much darker than I am; she is not a Creole."

Again I had an uncomfortable feeling that something was wrong in the house, and for a moment I had the impression that Rosamunda Marsina was begging me to stay. "Thank you," I said; "I'll stay."

She smiled at me with her lovely dark lips and left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

That night the first strange thing happened. Rosamunda Marsina's suggestive attitude, the vague fear that haunted her eyes, the sudden inexplicable agitation of her voice—these things had prepared me. Perhaps if I had gone to sleep at once, I would have known nothing. As I lay there, half asleep, I heard a distinct sound of someone walking on the floor above me, in some room farther back than my own. I thought of Miss Marsina's Aunt Abby at once, but recollected that the woman was a cripple and a near-invalid, and would not be likely to be up and about, especially not at this hour. Yet the footsteps were slow and dragging, and were accompanied by the sound of a cane tapping slowly at regular intervals against the floor. I sat up in bed to listen. Listening,

I could tell that it was only one foot that dragged. Abruptly, the foot steps stopped. Miss Abby had gotten out of her bed somehow, and had walked perhaps to the wall of the room from the bed. I heard guttural sounds suddenly, and then the dragging footsteps retreating. The woman talking to herself, I thought.

Then, above the dragging footsteps, I heard a disturbing shuffling which seemed to come from somewhere below, followed by sounds as of doors closing somewhere. In a moment, all was quiet again; but only for a moment—for suddenly there came a thin, reed-like wail of terror, followed at once by a shrill scream. I sat up abruptly. A window went up with a bang, and a harsh, guttural voice sounded from above. The voice from above had a magic effect, for silence, broken only by the sudden shuffling of feet, fell immediately.

I had got out of bed, and made my way to the door leading into the hall. I had seen on my first visit that the house lacked artificial light, and had brought an electric candle along. This I took up as I went toward the door. I had it in my hand as I opened the door. The first thing its light found was the white face of Rosamunda Marsina.

"Someone called. . . . I thought," I stammered.

She was agitated; even the comparatively dim illumination from the electric candle revealed her emotion. "*Non, non*—there was nothing," she said quickly. "You are mistaken, Mr. Stuard." Then, noticing the amazement which must have shown on my face, she added, uncertainly. "Perhaps the servants called out—but it is nothing; nothing is wrong."

As she said this, she gestured with her hands. She was wearing a long black gown with wide sleeves. As she raised her hands, the sleeves fell back along her arms. I think I must have started at what I saw there—at any rate, Rosamunda Marsina dropped her arms at once, shot a sharp glance at me through half-closed eyes, and walked swiftly away, saying, "Good night, Mr. Stuard." For on the white of her arms, I saw the distinct impressions of two large hands—hands which must have grasped her most cruelly, and only a short while before. Then, so suddenly as to leave me gasping, it came to me that Rosamunda Marsina had been waiting for me in the hall, waiting to see what I would



do and, I felt sure, sending me back into my room against her will!

I slept comparatively little that night.

In the morning I wanted to say something to my hostess, but I had hardly come from my room before she herself spoke. She came to me at the breakfast table, and said: "You must have had a powerful dream last night, Mr. Stuard. There was nothing wrong as you thought—nor did he servants call out!"

At once I understood that she was not talking for me. Her face was white and strained, her voice unnaturally loud. As quickly, I answered in an equal raised voice "I'm sorry. I should have warned you that I am often troubled by bad dreams."

Miss Marsina lost her tensy at once. She shot me a grateful glance, and left the room immediately. But I sat in silence, waiting for a sound I felt must come. I had not long to wait—a few moments passed—then, from upstairs, came the soft sound of a door closing. Someone had been listening, waiting to hear what Rosamunda Marsina would say to me, what I would answer!

From that moment I knew that I would get no more painting done until I knew what mystery surrounded the house and Miss Marsina.

I sketched my landscape that morning, and my hostess stood watching me. I liked her lovely dark face peering over my shoulder as I worked, but both of us were a little uneasy, and I could not do my best work. There was about her an air of restraint which interposed itself mysteriously the moment she tried to enjoy herself. She seemed a little frightened, too, and more than once I caught her eyes straying furtively to the second-floor windows.

The second night in the house was a hot, sultry night; a storm was brooding low on the horizon when I went to bed, but it must have passed over, for when I woke up somewhere between one and two in the morning, the moon was shining. I could not rest, and got out of bed. For a few moments I stood at the window, drinking in the sweet smell of the magnolias. Then, acting on a sudden impulse, I bent and crawled through the open window. I dropped to the ground silently and began to walk toward the rear of the house unconsciously, forgetting my promise to Miss Marsina. I remembered it suddenly, and



stopped. Then I heard a slight sound above me. I stepped quickly into the shadow of a bush, just at the corner of the house, where I could see both the side and rear of the house.

Then I looked up. There at the window of the corner room I saw a bloodless face pressed against the glass; it was a dark, ugly face, and the moonlight struck it full.

It was withdrawn as I looked, but not before I had got an impression of malefic power. Could it have been the face of Aunt Abby? According to what Rosamunda Marsina had said, that would be her room. And what was she looking at? Over the bushes behind the house, beyond the trees—it would be something in the fields. I turned. Should I risk trying to see, risk her spotting me as I went along the lane?

Keeping to the shadows, I moved along under the low hanging trees, looking toward the fields. Then suddenly I saw what Miss Abby must have seen. There were men in the fields, a number of them. I pressed myself against the trunk of a giant sycamore and watched them. They were Negroes, and they were working in the fields. Moreover, they were probably under orders, Miss Abby's orders. I understood abruptly that her watching them was to see that they did their work. But Negroes that worked at night!

Back in my room once more, I was still more thoroughly mystified. Did they work every night? It was true that I had seen no workers anywhere on the plantation during the day just passed, but then, I had not left the front of the house, and from there little of the plantation could be seen. I thought that next day surely I would mention this to Rosamunda Marsina, and the incidents of the night before, too.

Then I thought of something else. All the while that I had stood watching the Negroes, no word had passed among them. That was surely the height of the unusual.

But on the second day, I found that I had to go into New Orleans for some painting materials I had not supposed I would need, and for some clothes, also, and thus lost the opportunity to speak to Rosamunda Marsina before evening.

In the city, I went immediately to Sherman Jordan's apartment. Despite the fact that I had promised Rosamunda Marsina that I would

say as little about my stay with her as possible, I told my friend of my whereabouts.

"I knew pretty well you were out there," he said. His voice was not particularly cordial. I said nothing. "I daresay you are completely entranced by the beautiful Creole who lives there?"

"How did you know?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders, giving me a queer look. "There are stories about," he said.

"About Miss Marsina?" I felt suddenly angry.

"Not especially. Just stories about that place. Nothing definite. If you haven't noticed anything, perhaps it's just idle gossip." But Jordan's attitude showed that he did not believe the stories about the house in the magnolias to be just "idle gossip."

And I *had* noticed something, but instantly I resolved to say nothing to Jordan. "What stories?" I asked.

He did not appear to have heard my question. "They're from Haiti, aren't they?"

I nodded. "Yes. The old woman is a Haitian. The girl is not." Was he getting at something?

"Haiti—a strange, fascinating place." He stood looking out of the window. He turned suddenly. "I'd like to beg you to drop that work out there, John, but I know it wouldn't be of much use asking that, now you've started. There's something not right about that place, because strange stories don't grow out of thin air."

"If there's anything wrong out there, I'm going to find out."

He shrugged his shoulders. His smile was not convincing. "Of course," he said. Then: "You know, there's an old proverb in Creole patois '*Quand to mange atec diab' tenin to cuillere longue.*'"

"I don't understand Creole patois," I said, somewhat irritated.

"Literally, it is: 'When you sup with the devil, be sure you have a long spoon.'"

"I don't follow you," I said.

He smiled again. "Oh, it's just another warning."

I had no desire to listen longer to anything so indefinite and vague, so I changed the subject. I don't think anything he could have told

me would have influenced me, I would have gone back to that house and Rosamunda Marsina no matter what was lurking there. But I expected nothing so strange, so horrible, as that which I did discover.

I returned to the house that evening, and again put off saying anything to Rosamunda. But she herself afforded me an unlooked for opening before I went to bed that night. She had come down from upstairs, and I could see at once that there was something she wanted to tell me.

"I think it's only fair to tell you," she said, "that your door will be locked tonight, after you have gone to bed."

"Why?" I asked, trying not to betray my astonishment.

"It is because it is not desirable that you walk around at night."

This hurt me a little, suggesting as it did that perhaps I might make use of the darkness to spy out the house. I said: "Rosamunda, there are stories about this house, aren't there?"

I was sorry at once, for she looked suddenly very frightened. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I have heard things in New Orleans," I said slowly.

She mastered herself a little, asking "What?"

"Oh, nothing definite," I replied. "Some people think that there is something wrong out here."

"Something wrong? What?"

"I don't know."

"Have you seen anything wrong?"

"No . . ." I hesitated, and she caught my dubious tone.

"Do you suspect anything?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said.

She looked at me a little coldly. Already I was beginning to repent my having spoken to her about the house. Also, she had suspected at once that I had broken my promise to her and had talked about the house. I had not foreseen that, and cursed myself for a fool. I had succeeded only in creating an atmosphere of tension.

That night I was awakened by a sharp cry of terror, which was cut off abruptly even before I was fully awake. I was out of bed instantly, standing in the middle of the room, listening. Once I fancied I heard

the sound of Rosamunda's voice, a low, earnest sound, as if she were pleading with someone. Then, silence. How long I waited, I do not know. At last I took up my electric candle and made for the door. Then I remembered that it would be locked—as Rosamunda had told me. Yet I reached out and turned the knob, and the door was not locked!

I looked cautiously out into the hall. But I had time to see only one thing: a bloodless face, convulsed with hatred, staring into mine—the same face I had seen against the window of the second floor—and above it, a heavy cane upraised. Then the cane descended, catching me a glancing blow on the side of the head. I went down like a log.

How long I lay there I do not know; it could not have been long, for it was still dark when I came to—and found Rosamunda's frightened eyes watching my face anxiously, felt her delicate fingers on my forehead. I struggled to sit up, but she held me quiet.

"Be still," she murmured. Then she asked quickly, "You are not badly hurt?"

"No," I whispered. "It was just enough to put me out."

"Oh, it was my fault. If I had locked the door it would not have happened."

"Nonsense," I said quickly. "If I hadn't been so curious . . . if I hadn't heard your voice. . . ."

"I am glad you thought of me, John." It was the first time she had used my Christian name, and I felt more pleasure than I cared to admit. But before I could express my sentiment, she said swiftly: "In the morning you must go."

"What? Go away—and not come back?"

She nodded. "If you do not go away, both of us will suffer. I should not have let you come, let you stay."

Boldly I said: "I'm not going until I can take you with me."

She looked closely at me; then bent quickly and kissed me. For a moment I held her in my arms, then she pushed me gently away. "Listen," she said. "In the morning you must go with your baggage. Go anywhere—back to New Orleans. But at sundown, come back to me. You must not be seen by Aunt Abby. I will wait for you in the magnolias just below the veranda."



I stood up, steadying myself against the door frame. "I'll come back, Rosamunda," I said.

She nodded and fled down the hall. I went back into my room and packed my things.

In the morning I departed ostentatiously, making it certain that the older woman, Abby, had seen me go. But in the evening I was back. I never left the vicinity, and was within sight of the house all day. How could I leave there—when Rosamunda might be in danger? I approached the house that evening effectively screened by low trees and the magnolias.

Rosamunda was standing before the veranda, almost hidden in the bushes. She was agitated, standing there twisting her handkerchief in her hands. She ran forward a little as I came up. "Now I must tell you," she breathed. "I must tell someone—you. You must help me." She was obviously distraught.

I said: "I'll do anything I can for you, Rosamunda."

She began to talk now, rapidly. "We came from Haiti, John. That is a strange island, an island of weird, curious things. Sometimes it is called the magic island. And it is. Do you believe in magic things?"

I did have a knowledge of magic beliefs, some old legends I had picked up in the Indian country, and quite a collection of tales I had heard from levee Negroes. I nodded, saying: "I know very little of it, but I think it can be."

"You have never been to Haiti?"

"No," I replied.

She paused, turned and looked a little fearfully at the house; then spoke again. "There are many strange beliefs in Haiti," she said, talking slowly, yet betraying an eagerness to finish. Then she looked deep into my eyes and asked: "Do you know what a zombi is?"

I had heard weird half-hinted stories of animated cadavers seen in Haiti, whispered tales of ago-old Negro magic used to raise the dead of the black island. Vaguely, I knew what she meant. Yet I said: "No."

"It is a dead man," she went on hurriedly, "a dead man who has been brought out of his grave and made to live again and to work."

"But such a thing cannot be," I protested, suddenly horrified at an

idea that began to form in my mind, a terrible suggestion which I sought to banish quickly. It would not go. I listened for Rosamunda's hushed and tense voice.

"Believe me, John Stuard—they do exist!"

"No, no," I said.

She stopped me abruptly "You are making it hard for me."

"I'm sorry, I said "I will believe you." But inwardly I protested, surely such a thing could not be! Yet I could not banish from my mind the memory of strangely silent figures working the fields at night.

Rosamunda spoke swiftly, her words coming in agonized rush. "That woman Abby she knew how to raise these people from their graves. When we came to New Orleans, we came alone. Just the two of us. She was in a hurry to get out of Haiti; I now think she was wanted in Port au Prince I do not know I was only a little girl, but I can remember these things. Every year they come more and more distinctly to me. Soon after we were here, the slaves came."

I cut in: "What slaves?"

"They are in the cellars many of them. All Negroes. We keep them in the cellars all day; only at night Abby sends them out to work. I have been so afraid you might find them, for you heard them screaming—and you might have seen them in the fields at night."

"But surely you don't mean—you can't mean. . . ."

"I do. *They are dead!*"

"But, Rosamunda . . .!"

"Please, let me tell you what I know." I nodded, and she went on. "I was quite old when Matilda came. She was the last of them. All along up to her, the slaves came, one after the other. I never saw them come. One day they were just here, that is all. But many nights Abby was gone and soon after, slaves would come. Abby always took care of them herself, making sweet bread and water for them. They ate nothing more. After Matilda came, something happened. Aunt Abby hurt herself, and couldn't leave the house. She wouldn't have a doctor, and since then she could leave her room only with great difficulty. She had a speaking tube put into her room; it ran down into the cellars, so that she could direct the men—those poor dead men—into the fields.

They were taught to come back as soon as light showed in the eastern sky. Only Abby could direct them, but I could tell Matilda what to do. Over Matilda Abby had no power—it often happens that way.

"After she came, there were no more slaves. I was quite grown then, and I came on a newspaper one day that told of a series of grave robberies that had been climaxed by the recent snatching of the body of a colored woman, Matilda Martin. That was right after Matilda came. Since then, I have known. At first it was horrible for me to live here, but there was no place for me to go. I have been living with these dead men and Abby, John, and I cannot go on—and I cannot leave these poor dead ones behind me. I want to go away with you, but they must be sent back to the graves from which she took them."

Looking at her frightened yet determined face, I knew that she would go away with me. I did not want the house, nor the magnolias; I wanted Rosamunda Marsina. "There is a way, then, to send them back?" I asked, still only half believing her shocking story.

She nodded eagerly. "They must be given salt—any food with salt and they will know they are dead, and will find their way back to their graves."

"And Miss Abby?" I said.

She looked at me. "She is too strong; we can do nothing if she knows."

"What shall we do?" I asked.

Rosamunda's eyes went suddenly cold. She said: "Matilda can be directed to Abby. Only I can direct her. Matilda hates Abby as I do. Abby is a fiend—she has robbed these dead of their peace. If I go from here, she must not be able to follow—else she will hound us until we are dead, and after that. . . . I don't want to think what might happen then."

An idea came to me, and at first I wanted to brush it aside. But it was persistent—and it *was* a way out. "Rosamunda," I said, "send Matilda up to Abby."

Rosamunda looked at me. She nodded. "I was thinking that way," she said. "But it must be before she has the salt, because once she had tasted salt there is nothing left for her but to find her grave."

Then she shot a frightened glance at the windows of the second

floor. She clutched my arm "Quick," she murmured. "They will be coming from the cellars soon. We must be ready for them. They never refuse food, never. I have made some little pistachio candies, with salt. We must give the candies to them."

She led the way, almost running into the house. I came silently after her. Below me I could hear the shuffling of many feet, and above, the dragging footsteps of Miss Abby, moving away from her speaking tube. Rosamunda snatched up the little plate of candy and preceded me to the back door.

Then suddenly the cellar doors opened, and a file of staring men shuffled slowly out, looking neither to right nor to left, seeing us, yet not seeing us. Rosamunda stepped boldly forward, holding out the plate. The foremost of them took a piece of the salted candy, and went on, munching it. Their black faces were expressionless. When the Negroes had all taken of the candy, Rosamunda turned to reenter the house. "Come quickly," she said. "Soon they will know." I hesitated, and saw—and my doubts were swept away, leaving my mind in chaos.

The little group had stopped abruptly, huddled together. Then, one by one, they began to wail terribly into the night, and even as I watched, they began to move off, hurriedly now, running across the fields toward their distant graves, a line of terrible, tragic figures against the sky.

I felt Rosamunda shuddering against me, and slipped my arm gently around her. "Listen!" she said, her voice trembling. Above us I could hear suddenly the angry snarling voice of Miss Abby. At the same time the sound of wood beating wood came to us: Abby was pounding the walls with her cane.

Matilda stood in the kitchen, and Rosamunda went up to her at once, addressing her in a soft, persuasive voice. "Above there is Abby, Matilda. Long ago she took you away from where you were—took you to be her slave. You have not liked her, Matilda, you have hated her. Go up to her now. She is yours. When you come down, there will be candy on the table for you."

Matilda nodded slowly; then she turned and began to shuffle heavily into the hall toward the stairs. Upstairs, silence had fallen.

Both of us ran from the kitchen, snatching up two small carpet-bags



which Rosamunda had put into the corridor, and which she pointed out to me as we went. We jumped from the veranda and ran down the path. Behind us rose suddenly into the night the shrill screaming of a woman in deadly terror. It was shut off abruptly, horribly. Rosamunda was shuddering. We turned to run. We had gone only a little way down the deserted road when we heard the nearby sound of a woman wailing. That was Matilda. Rosamunda hesitated, I with her, pressed close in the shadow of an overhanging sycamore. We looked back. A shadowy figure was running across the fields; in the house a lamp was burning low in the kitchen. And yet, was it a lamp? The light suddenly flared up. I turned Rosamunda about before she had time to see what I had seen. Matilda had turned over the lamp. The house was burning.

Rosamunda was whimpering a little, the strain beginning to tell "We'll have to go away. When they find Abby dead, they'll want me."

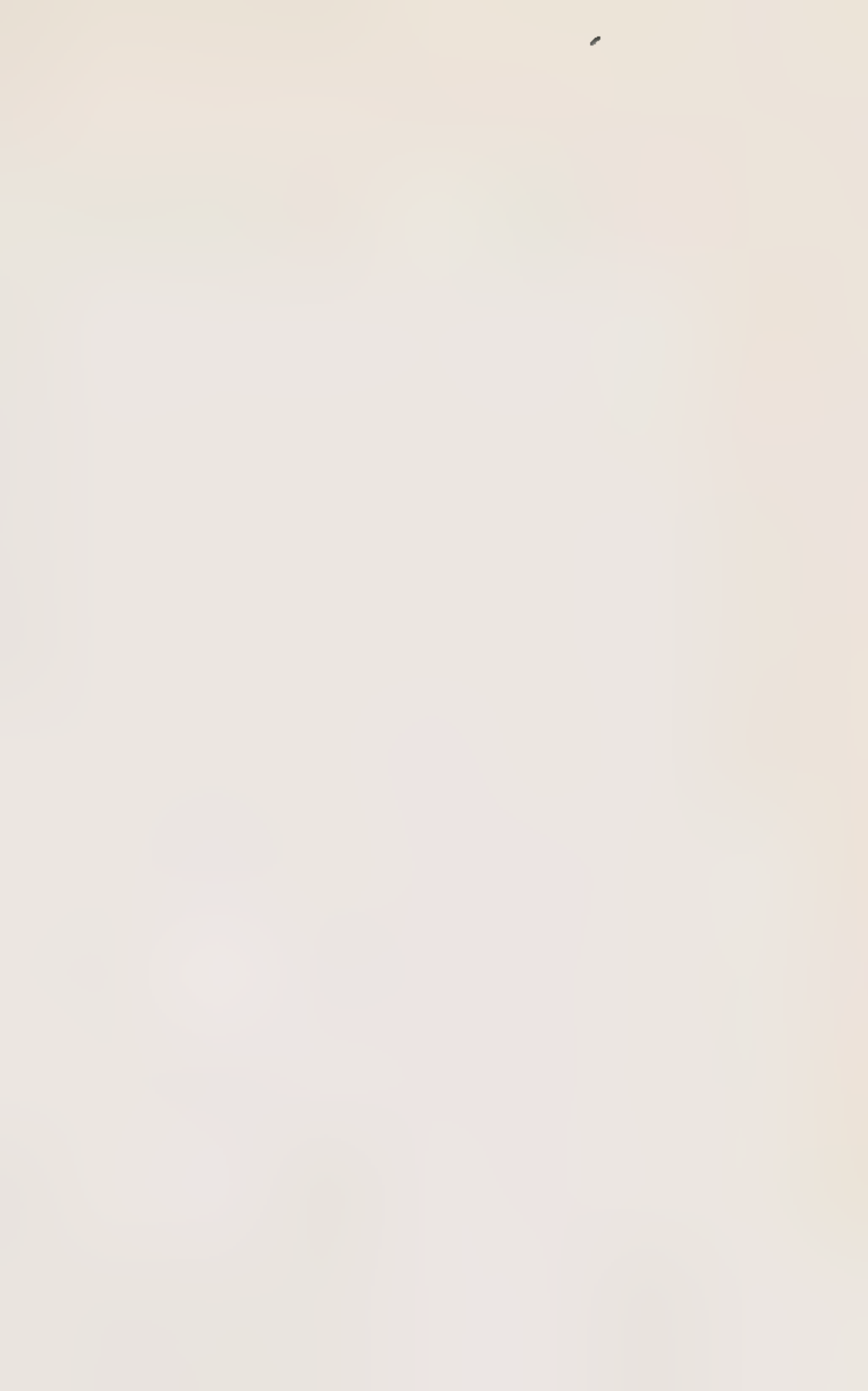
I said, "Yes Rosamunda," but I knew we would not have to go away, unless that fire did not burn. We hurried on to New Orleans, and went to Jordan's apartment.

Next day it was discovered that the house in the magnolias had burned to the ground, Miss Abby with it. The creole woman, Rosamunda Marsina, had spent the night with her fiance in the apartment of Sherman Jordan—so said the papers. Jordan had seen to that. Rosamunda and I were married soon after and went out to rebuild that house.

Since then, I have tried often to dismiss the events of that horrible night as a chaotic dream, a thing half imagined, half real. But certain things forbade any such interpretation, no matter how much I longed to believe that both Rosamunda and I had been deceived by too vivid belief in Haitian legends.

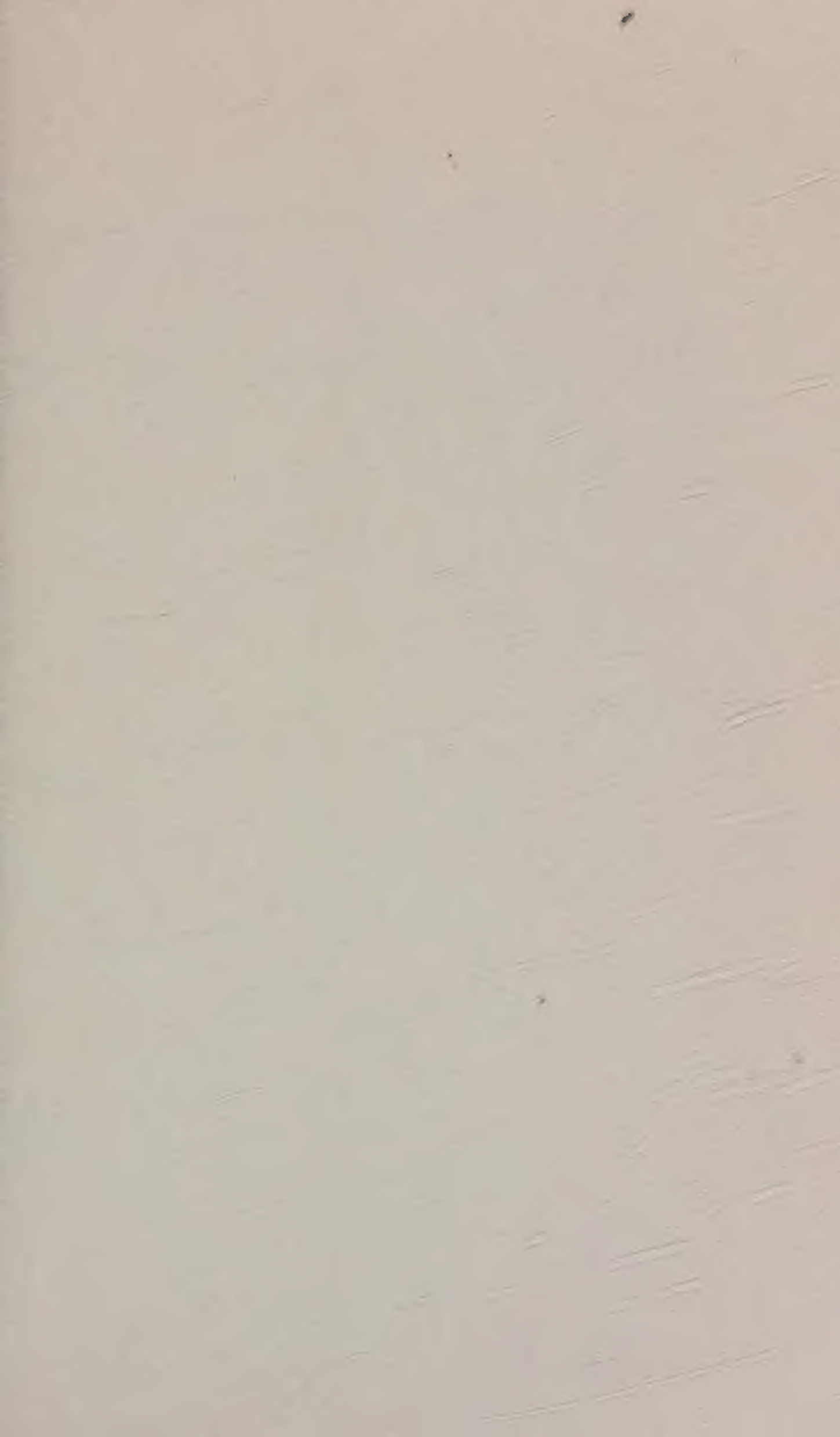
There were especially those other things in the papers that day—the day the burning of the house was chronicled—things I kept carefully from Rosamunda's eyes. They were isolated stories of new graveyard outrages—that is what the papers called them, but I know better *the finding of putrefied remains in half-opened graves of Negroes whose bodies had been stolen long years ago—and the curious detail that the graves had been half dug by bare fingers, as if dead hands were seeking the empty coffins below.*

Two thousand five hundred copies of this book have been printed by The Collegiate Press, George Banta Company Inc, Menasha, Wisconsin, from Linotype Garamond on Winnebago Eggshell. The binding cloth is Holliston Black Novelex.











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AUGUST DERLETH is the author of well over a hundred books, among them *Walden West*, *Who Knocks?*, *Wind Over Wisconsin*, *The Milwaukee Road*, *Sac Prairie People*, *Country Growth*, *Village Year*, *Sleep No More*, *Evening in Spring*, *Someone in the Dark*, *The Shield of the Valiant*, *The Wisconsin: River of a Thousand Isles*, *H. P. L.: A Memoir*, *Wisconsin in Their Bones*, *Lonesome Places*. He has contributed to over 500 magazines here and abroad. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1938 to further his *Sac Prairie Saga*, and since that time—apart from brief teaching stints at the University of Wisconsin and elsewhere—he has remained in his native Sauk City, Wisconsin, where he now lives with his two children, April Rose and Walden William, and where he conducts the affairs of Arkham House.

\* \* \*

MARK SCHORER, like August Derleth a native of Sauk City, and also a Guggenheim Fellow since 1941, is the author of *A House Too Old*, *The Hermit Place*, *The State of Mind*, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, *The Wars of Love*, *The Story*, and *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. He has contributed to many magazines, among them *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, *Mademoiselle*, *Collier's*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Story*, *The Harvard Advocate*, *Esquire* and others, particularly in the domain of literary scholarship. He has also edited texts like *Modern British Fiction: Essays in Criticism*. He has taught at Wisconsin, Dartmouth, and Harvard, and is currently a Professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, where he was, until recently, Chairman of the Department of English.

\* \* \*

The stories in *Colonel Markesan* and *Less Pleasant People* were written during the summer of 1931 when the two fledgling authors shared a cottage along the Wisconsin River in Sauk City. They were written specifically for *Weird Tales*, where a majority of them were published. Several of them have since appeared on Boris Karloff's Thriller program on television, and at least one, *The Return of Andrew Bentley*, has been in print for many years in Bennett Cerf's Modern Library anthology, *Famous Ghost Stories*.